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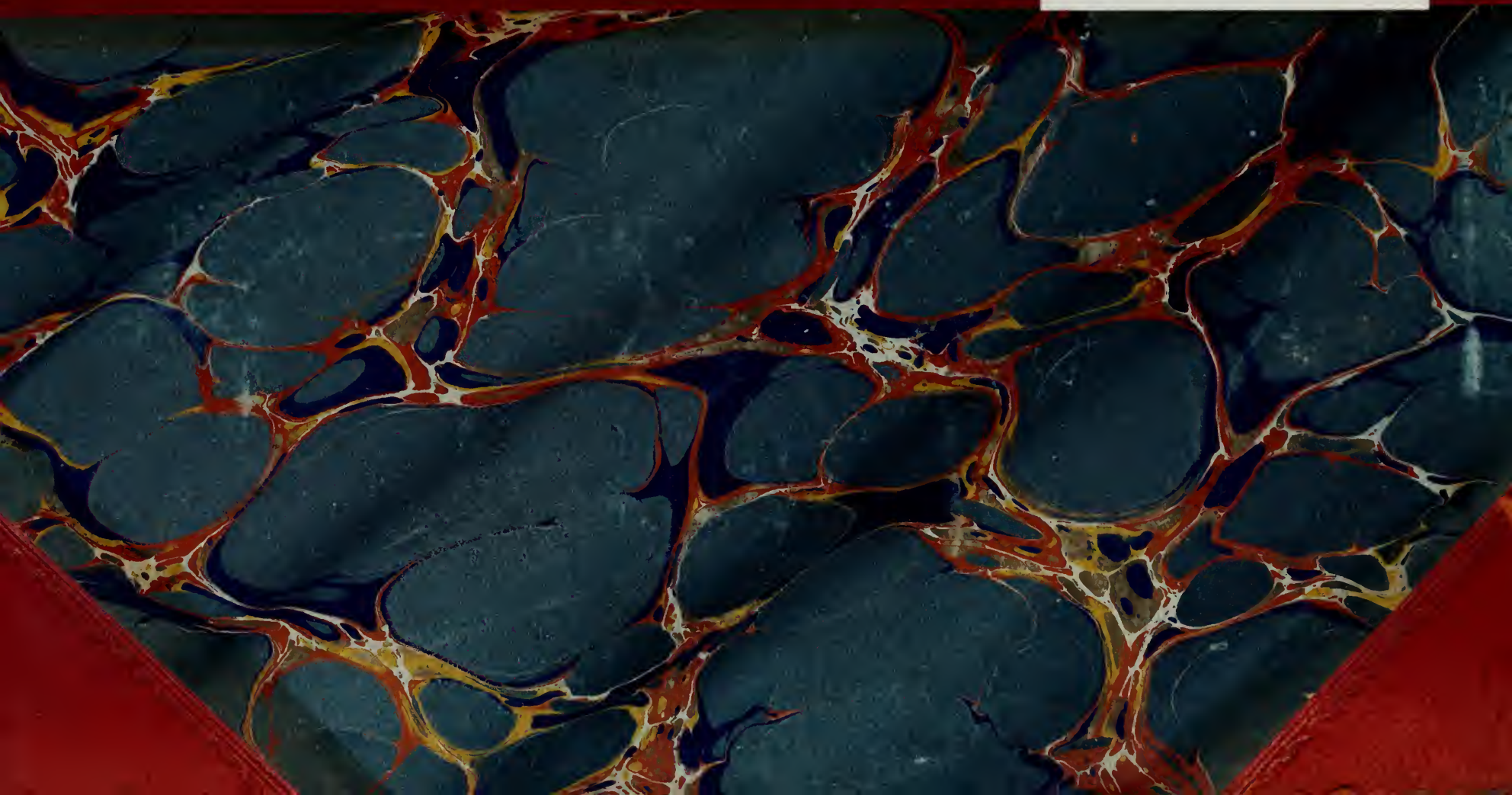

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"THAT'S JUST WHAT I CAN'T FOR THE LIFE OF ME RECOLLECT," ANSWERED MISS IVIMPEY; AND THEN SHE BURST INTO TEARS.

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

CHARLES W. WOOD.

VOLUME LIV.

July to December, 1892.

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"'That's just what I can't for the life of me recollect,' answered Miss Ivimpey; and then she burst into tears."

"The bell was rung, and Esther herself answered it."

"She came a step or two nearer, and took one of his hands in both hers."

"'Mrs. Clemson has told me all about your illness,' said Mrs. Warriner."

"Out of the room, along the corridor, and upstairs, slowly, mechanically, as a woman in a dream."

"Esther was summoned."

"Until the miracle of music works
Under the Master's hands."

Illustrations to "In the Lotus-Land."

THE ARGOSY.

JULY, 1892.

A GUILTY SILENCE.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LUNCHEON AT MRS. SUTTON'S.

WHEN Margaret Davenant had once familiarised her mind with any fact, and had satisfied herself that, however unpleasant such fact might be, it could not in any way be avoided, she accepted the consequences of it as a matter of course, and was in nowise given to useless repining, or, as Mrs. Sutton would have put it, to "crying over spilt milk." So, in the present case, when the first natural burst of regret for the loss of that fortune which she had so fondly hoped her sister would share had in some measure spent its force, she decided at once, with a good grace, to accept things as they were, and neither by hint, word, nor look to let any living soul know what a prize she had played for and lost.

Margaret's ambitious dream had vanished like a wreath of smoke in the wind, but Trix might be humbly happy, yet—that and nothing more.

Next morning Margaret found it impossible to settle down quietly to her duties in the school; there was a restlessness upon her which she could not overcome. Hugh had said something about this Mr. Peterson insisting that the matter of the missing letter should be investigated by the postal authorities. What if such investigation should take place? Well, even in such case what had she to fear? Nothing—absolutely nothing. No human eye had seen her take the letter; it was a crime that rested between herself and her own conscience; a crime that in this world could never be brought home to her. Yet, despite this assurance, repeated to herself again and again, she was seized at intervals with a strange, nervous trembling, too slight to be observable by any one but herself, but very distressing while it lasted, which she could conquer and put down for a time only by an intense effort of will. The inaction of the class-room seemed to stifle her. She paused in the midst of correcting a French exercise,

and thought, "Perhaps even now Mr. Peterson is at the post office." She felt that she could rest in ignorance no longer; information of some sort she must have. So she laid down her pen, and making a hurried excuse to Miss Easterbrook, she put on her bonnet and shawl, and set out for the town. "I will go to Mrs. Sutton," she thought; "she will know everything, and will tell me everything without waiting to be questioned."

Mrs. Sutton, standing at her parlour window, saw Margaret coming down the street, and hastened to open the door for her. Margaret's face was, perhaps, a shade paler and more worn than common, but to all outward seeming she was as quietly self-possessed, as serenely unruffled, as she always was in the eyes of the world.

"Good morning, my dear Miss Davenant. You are as welcome as the flowers in May," said the old lady heartily. "I was dreaming about you only last night. I thought I saw you—, but, there, I won't tell you anything about it, for I dare say you look upon dreams as so much rubbish. Nay, but you must take off your things and stay a bit, now you are here. That's right. Now, do make yourself at home. One of Hugh's books that, which he has left here and forgotten. For my part, I'm thankful to say that I've never read many books since I grew up, or I should hardly be the woman I am. Two pins crossed, lying on the floor,—that's unlucky; we shall hear bad news before long; and, indeed, a coffin leapt out of the fire last night, which—— But here am I, running on, and forgetting that I am expecting both Hugh and his cousin Hugo in a few minutes to luncheon, as they call it, but it seems to me neither more nor less than a cold dinner. Nay, my dear Miss Davenant, you must not stir. They will both be very glad to see you; and, indeed, here they are, so that it's no use your running away. Bless me, if there isn't three of them!"

Three of them there certainly were; to wit, Hugh Randolph, his cousin Hugo, and Mr. Peterson, the Australian lawyer. Margaret's heart beat a little faster as she thought of the ordeal that was probably before her; but she set her firm, white teeth together, and steadied her nerves by a supreme effort of will to meet with outward calmness whatever might happen next.

To Hugo Randolph and Mr. Peterson Margaret was presented in due form; and Mrs. Sutton, in a loud aside, did not fail to inform all whom it might concern that Miss Davenant was own sister to the young lady Hugh was about to marry. Much as she hungered for information, Margaret made as though she would fain have gone, feeling that the party was, in a certain sense, a family one, and that Mr. Hugo Randolph might not care to have his affairs discussed before a stranger. But none of them would hear of her going; and Hugo himself vowed that if she did not stay to grace their luncheon, he would have neither bit nor sup in Helsingham, but pack up his portmanteau, and start by the first train.

"You must really permit me to look upon you in the light of a relative," he said; "and as it is not every day that one has so charming an addition to one's family, one cannot do better than improve such rare occasions to the utmost; so do, pray, let me persuade you to stay."

Margaret gave him one of her rare smiles, and, slipping off her gloves, she sat down at table without more ado.

He might have been one of the Anakim, this Hugo Randolph, so much did he tower above the ordinary race of mortals. A big man, bearded and bronzed; tanned with the wind and sun and rain of many seasons; dressed in the rough, free-and-easy costume of your true fisherman, to whom a fashionable cut is of less consequence than roomy comfort as regards his habiliments; a sportsman who made sport the business of his life, and who, even while he was talking to Margaret, was fingering a bulky pocket-book stuffed with hooks and flies and lines, and other piscatorial adjuncts. Between this huge disciple of the gentle art and the lawyer fresh from the antipodes, the contrast was a striking one. A little man, light-complexioned, with sandy hair and a straggling sandy beard; brisk and alert to a painful degree; wanting in repose, and the quiet grace of inaction; with something dry and acrid about him, as though all the sweet juices of his life had dried up under the hot sun of his country; such was Mr. Samuel Peterson, of Melbourne, Australia.

"I can hardly believe, Hugo, that this good fortune of yours is real," said Mrs. Sutton. "It seems too much like a dream."

"And I dare say you find it quite as difficult to believe that I deserve it?"

"That I do, boy," answered the outspoken old woman. "Not that I'm sorry you've got it; but still, as you say, what have you done to deserve it?"

"Pardon me, Granny, but I did not say anything of the kind," answered Hugo, laughingly. "No such stupid idea ever entered my head; for whatever other people may think of my merits, I consider that all the good fortune which may accrue to me will have been fully deserved, were it merely from the fact that my life has been a thoroughly consistent one."

"A consistently lazy one," said Mrs. Sutton, with an irate shake of the cap ribbons.

"Precisely so: a consistently lazy one," returned Hugo blandly. "Hugh, if you have another wing to spare, I'll take it. This dry sherry, Mr. Peterson, is one of those institutions of the old country which you gentlemen from beyond the seas cannot reasonably hope to equal for several centuries to come. Yes, Granny dear, your Hugo prides himself on having been consistently lazy from his youth upwards—that is to say, as far as the hard facts of life would permit him to be so. If, in the earlier part of his career, circumstances obliged him to work for his daily bread, he did it under protest and against his will, and took

the earliest possible opportunity of shirking so disagreeable a necessity. Hugh, here, will be my witness that the very morning I received the news that my poor old Aunt Barbara had left me two hundred and fifty pounds a year for life, I entered into negotiation with him for the disposal of my Helsingham practice."

"A practice which you had shamefully neglected," interposed Mrs. Sutton.

"Not a doubt of it, Granny," answered Hugo cheerfully. "But, then, you see, my tastes never did lie in that direction. Ah, what a light heart was mine the morning I found myself a free man, with drugs and gallipots cast behind me for ever! Two-fifty a year! Five pounds a week and no work to do for it! What might not a man of my simple tastes effect with such a sweet little income?"

"Yes, and a pretty use you've put it to," said Mrs. Sutton. "Never done a decent day's work since it came to you."

"Not in your meaning of the term, I am happy to think," answered Hugo. "But many a hard day's work with rod and gun—many a glorious day on lake and moor—in token of which I now drink to the memory of my dear old Aunt."

"Let us hope, at all events, that you will make better use of the fortune that is about to come to you than you have done of poor Aunt Bab's, who never thought her hard-saved bit of money would be squandered as you have squandered it."

"Can you guess, Granny, what momentous question I have been debating in my mind from the moment Mr. Peterson here told me of my good fortune? But no, it is not likely that you can. The question is this: Whether I shall buy a yacht and go to Norway, or whether I shall go to Africa to shoot lions. It's too late in the season, I'm afraid, for the former; but lions, I suppose, may be bagged all the year round."

"You are a perfect Pagan, Hugo Randolph, neither more nor less; and you'll come to a bad ending one of these days, mark my words if you don't."

"If I don't, I will; but if I do, I sha'n't be able. You look mystified, and well you may. Let us change the subject." Then, turning to Margaret, he added: "I suppose, Miss Davenant, that you have heard about this strange affair of the missing letter? My new friend, Mr. Peterson, to whom I am really much indebted, looks upon the matter in a far more serious light than I am inclined to do. I say that the letter must have been lost in transit, and that after so long a time, especially as the matter to which it referred has now been put right, it is hardly worth inquiring into. Mr. Peterson says—"

"That on public grounds and in a purely business point of view," interposed Mr. Peterson, in a harsh, high-pitched voice, "the loss of the letter ought to be made the subject of strict inquiry. Unless we do our best to nip such transactions in the bud, who can tell when or where they will cease?"

"Who, indeed?" asked Hugo, with mock solemnity. "But Miss Davenant has not yet favoured us with her opinion. How say you, my lud, is this matter of the missing letter worth further inquiry, or were it wiser to draw a veil over it and relegate it to the limbo of things out-worn and forgotten?"

Over Margaret's white face a wintry smile flickered fitfully, as she bent her dark eyes now on Hugo and now on the lawyer. That by her, of all people in the world, such a question should have to be answered! Just for one moment the impulse was strong upon her to stand up before them all, and say, "Trouble yourselves no further; it was I who took the letter." Just for one moment she thought thus; the next, a tiny imp seemed to be whispering in her ear, "Oh, what pretty sport you are having! Isn't it nice to hoodwink these respectable nobodies? For all you pretend to be so virtuous, you can't help enjoying it."

"It is hardly fair, Mr. Randolph," said Margaret, with a smile and a little shrug, "to put such a question to a woman; it seems to me a man's business entirely. But since you have appealed to me, it is of course necessary that I should do my best to keep up the traditional reputation of our sex for superior wisdom. Accordingly, my opinion is this: that if you, Mr. Randolph, do not choose to consider yourself aggrieved, and are quite willing to let the matter sleep, I cannot see the necessity for any one to take up the cudgels in defence of a grievance that has no existence."

"Argued like a second Portia!" exclaimed Hugo enthusiastically.

"Argued like a true woman!" said Mr. Peterson with a little sneer. "Ingenuous, no doubt; and touching, as indicative of a profound belief in the innocence of human nature; but far from convincing to a plain business man like me. Still, as you say, Miss Davenant, if Mr. Randolph does not choose to consider himself aggrieved, the ground is at once cut from under my feet, and there is no course left me, save to bow to your united decision."

"Bravo! Spoken like a man!" said Hugo, with a slap of his big hand on the table.

Margaret's heart gave a great throb of relief and gratitude. What happiness! The whole wretched affair was about to be hushed up and forgotten.

But her gratitude proved to be premature; for Mrs. Sutton, who had not spoken for what to her seemed a very long time, took advantage of the lull for the enunciation of her opinion on the point under discussion, which opinion was pretty sure to be in direct opposition to that of some of the company; for Mrs. Sutton held contradiction to be the salt of conversation. "Well, I for one can't see but what Mr. Peterson is just right about this letter," she exclaimed with much energy. "If folks' letters are to be opened and read in a free country, one might as well live under the Emperor of Chiney, or any other tyrant; and, indeed, I've heard say that when you miss a

letter, you have only to write to the head man in London, and he'll have it hunted up for you, and sent down specially with his compliments, which is all right and proper; and why you couldn't do so in the present case, I, for one, can't imagine."

"But don't you see, Granny," said Hugo, "that nobody knew till yesterday that the letter was missing; and as Mr. Peterson himself was the writer of the letter, and brought the news which it contained, there is no occasion for our making any bother about it."

"News or no news," said the old lady irately, "I know that if they had defrauded me out of a letter, I wouldn't have sat down under the loss of it as quietly as you have done. But you always were a bit of a milksop, Hugo, my boy, for all you are such a big fellow."

"May be so, Granny, may be so," said Hugo equably.

As for Doctor Hugh, he had been devoting himself to the quiet discussion of his luncheon, and to a silent but not unamused observation of what was going on around him; but now that the conversation seemed to be growing slightly acrimonious, he decided that it was high time to end the dispute either one way or the other. "Opinion being equally divided," he said, "Miss Davenant and Hugo taking one side of the question, and Aunty and Mr. Peterson the opposite, the casting vote evidently rests with this child. I beg, therefore, that you will all adopt my decision as the final one, and——"

"There's somebody just outside who can settle it a good deal better than you can, Hugh," burst in Mrs. Sutton, "and that's Dorcas Ivimpey, who has just stepped into the grocer's shop on the other side of the way. If a foreign letter was ever received by her for anybody in Helsingham, I'll warrant she'll remember it. Her memory is just wonderful for such things. Suppose I send over, and ask her to step up?"

"The very thing!" said Hugo. "Nothing could be better. I remember Miss Ivimpey very well, and intended calling to see both her and her brother before leaving the town. Many's the good day's fishing Charley Ivimpey and I have had together. He used to be the best hand at throwing a fly within a dozen miles of Helsingham."

Mrs. Sutton's servant was at once sent over the way with a message for Miss Ivimpey, and a few minutes later the worthy postmistress was ushered into the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HUSHED UP.

Margaret's heart felt as though it were being grasped by a hand of ice as Miss Ivimpey came into the room. Her reason kept whispering to her that she had nothing to fear; that her secret was her own, and could in nowise become known unless she betrayed it of her own free will. Yet, despite all this, her soul felt sick almost unto death, and

she was filled with vague apprehensions of some unknown danger, which seemed to her frighted imagination all the more terrible in that she could not even guess how or whence it might come.

Miss Ivimpey came limping into the room, but paused in dismay when she saw the number of strange faces by which she was surrounded; for, being without her spectacles, she did not immediately recognise the familiar features of Miss Davenant and Dr. Randolph. These two, however, quickly made themselves known to her. Then, Mrs. Sutton introduced Mr. Peterson as a gentleman from Australia; and last of all, Hugo strode up to her, and putting out a big paw, asked her whether she had quite forgotten her old sweetheart, the "Fishing Doctor;" and further, wished to know whether her affections were still disengaged. She recognised him in a moment, and shook him heartily by the hand; and responded to his banter by telling him that she had been secretly married six years before, and that her husband was a black drummer, and big enough to thrash two such infants as him, if he treated her with the slightest impertinence.

Mrs. Sutton, ever hospitably inclined, pressed the postmistress to partake of lunch; but Miss Ivimpey was one of that class who like best to do their eating furtively, and in secret as it were, as though there was something almost criminal in the act; and are much put out if, by any chance, they come under the operation of a pair of strange eyes during meal-time. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at that, in the present case, she should strenuously decline her friend's pressing offers. In other respects she was quite at her ease, and was presently in the midst of an animated conversation with Hugo respecting her brother Charley, and his achievements with a certain fly which he had lately invented. At length Hugh looked at his watch, and declared that his time was nearly up; and this brought to Hugo's mind the fact that he had quite lost sight of the special reason on account of which Miss Ivimpey had been summoned. "Wait a minute, Monsieur le Docteur," he said. "I had almost forgotten all about that trumpery business of the missing letter; but as our friend Mr. Peterson is evidently troubled in his mind about it, we may as well try to have it settled at once and for ever."

Mr. Peterson, with an uneasy cough, edged his chair a little nearer Miss Ivimpey, and fingered a tiny memorandum-book in his waistcoat pocket, with the evident intention of taking notes on the slightest provocation.

"I am sorry, Miss Ivimpey," began Hugo, "to have to intrude a matter of business—for such, I suppose, I must call it—on your attention at a moment like the present; but I hope you will allow the little time I have at my disposal (I leave here by the four P.M. train) to plead as my excuse."

"Surely, Mr. Hugo, no apology is needed from you for doing anything of the kind," said Miss Ivimpey. "I shall be glad to

answer any questions, and give you any information as far as it lies in my power to do so."

"Thanks. I know your obliging disposition of old," answered Hugo. "My catechism shall be as brief as possible," he went on. "Oblige me by rummaging in your memory, and try whether you can recollect receiving, on or about the—on or about what?" turning to Mr. Peterson.

"The eighteenth of June. Mail reached London previous day," said the lawyer, with a sort of sweet alacrity; and under cover of this remark, he whipped his pencil and memorandum-book out of his pocket, and proceeded to take stenographic notes of the questions and answers which followed.

"Receiving on or about the eighteenth of June," resumed Hugo, "a foreign letter, written on the usual thin foreign paper, bearing the postmark of Melbourne, Australia, and addressed to my cousin, Dr. Hugh Randolph. Have you any recollection of such document?"

Miss Ivimpey's face turned red, and from that to white, and then back to red again, while Hugo was putting his question. So agitated was she, in fact, that for a moment or two she seemed unable to reply; but her air, when she did so, was rather that of a person troubled in her mind than of one criminally guilty.

"Mr. Hugo Randolph,—Sir," she said, "why should I wish to deceive you? I do remember such a letter as the one you speak of."

Marked sensation among the auditory. Mr. Peterson having taken a note, bit the end of his pencil viciously, and waited to hear more.

"Do you remember what became of the letter in question?" asked Hugo.

"That's just what I can't for the life of me recollect," answered Miss Ivimpey; and then she burst into tears.

"Nay, nay, that will never do!" said Hugo soothingly. "There is no need for you to distress yourself thus. Remember that you are among friends—among people who would be sorry to annoy you in any way. I am asking about this letter merely out of curiosity to ascertain the reason of its non-arrival. It may ease your mind to know that the letter itself was really of very little consequence." Mr. Peterson looked disgusted.

"Now that you have asked me about it, I won't try to disguise anything from you," resumed Miss Ivimpey, with tearful eyes. "I know that I was to blame, but I'll tell you all about it as straightforwardly as I can. I have a distinct recollection of receiving the letter you speak of. It was, as you say, from Australia: I recollect the postmark: and written on foreign paper; and was addressed to Mr. Hugh Randolph, surgeon, Helsingham, England. It did not come to me in the London bag, as it ought to have done, but in the Barrowfield bag, and too late for the afternoon delivery. The London people must have put it into the Barrowfield bag in mistake; at least, I remember that was the conclusion I came to at the time. Seeing

that it was a foreign letter, and thinking that it might be of importance, I laid it on one side, in order to have it delivered specially that evening, instead of keeping it over for the morning delivery, which, in the ordinary course of things, I should have done. Old Jacob, the postman, generally looks in about nine o'clock of an evening to assist with the night-mail, and I intended him to take it as soon as he should come. By-and-by in came Miss Davenant; and it is fortunate that she happens to be here this morning, because she can bear me out in what I say; and she stopped awhile. Then, in came another lady friend, who stayed to supper; and what with one thing and another, I clean forgot all about the Australian letter till next morning, just as old Jacob had got back from his first round. Something brought it all at once to my mind, and at that moment you might have knocked me down with a feather. Well, I went at once to the pigeon-hole in which I had left the letter overnight, never doubting but I should find it there. But it was not there; neither could I find it anywhere else, though I sought for it high and low, and in every nook and corner I could think of. Charles said that he had not seen it; and old Jacob, who might just as well be without a memory for any use he makes of the one he has, could not recollect whether he had seen it or not. He had delivered two letters at Dr. Randolph's that morning, but whether one of them was a foreign letter, he was quite helpless to recollect. I was terribly distressed, you may be sure, for such a thing had never happened before during all the years I had been in the Helsingham post-office. As I was not quite certain whether the letter had been delivered or not, I was afraid to make any inquiry about it; and was in mortal dread every day for a long time lest Dr. Randolph should send to ask after it. As I gather from what you, Mr. Hugo, have said, that the letter was never delivered, there is only one way in which I can account for its disappearance. As Miss Davenant will, no doubt, remember—for the circumstance to which I allude took place while she was in conversation with me in the office—when I was in the act of lighting the gas, my foot slipped; and in trying to save myself, my dress swept a whole heap of unsorted letters off the counter on to the floor. I can only conclude that the Australian letter was one of the number; and that, somehow or other, though I confess I can't see how, it must have slipped under the woodwork, and escaped my observation when I picked up the others. I was glad, Mr. Hugo, to hear you say that the letter was not of great consequence, for I can assure you the loss of it has lain heavily on my conscience, and been the cause of many a sleepless night."

As Miss Ivimpey brought her narration to an end, she seemed inclined to lapse into tears again, but Hugo did his best, in his hearty way, to cheer her up, and to medicine the wound which her nice sense of duty had made her suffer from so acutely.

"A most candid and straightforward explanation," said Hugo warmly; "and one with which we are all perfectly satisfied! Even

our slightly cantankerous friend, Mr. Peterson, can hardly be otherwise, I think."

Mr. Peterson, with his eye on his note-book, smiled rather loftily. "Oh, perfectly satisfied!" he said. "But may I be permitted to put one or two queries to Miss Ivimpey?"

"Half a hundred if you like," answered Miss Ivimpey. "Most happy, I'm sure."

Hugo seemed about to interpose; but, on second thoughts, he drew back with a shrug, and began to busy himself with his book of hooks and flies.

"You told us just now, I think," began Mr. Peterson, with what he considered an eminently judicial air, "that Miss Davenant was with you in your private office on the same evening that the letter disappeared so mysteriously?"

"Precisely so. Miss Davenant was with me for more than an hour."

"And that, still later on, if I understand you rightly, another friend of yours came into the office to see you?"

"No, sir, there you are mistaken. I said that another friend of mine came in to see me, but I said nothing about her coming into the office; indeed, she never set foot in it, but was shown direct into the drawing-room."

"Then, in point of fact," resumed Mr. Peterson, "beyond the members of your own family and Miss Davenant, who will, I hope, excuse me for mixing up her name in this business, no one set foot in your private office on the evening in question?"

"No one unconnected with the business of the office," answered Miss Ivimpey, "except Miss Davenant and her maid, a girl whose name I forget."

"Oh, oh!" said the lawyer, with a chuckle of intense satisfaction. "A girl whose name you forget, eh? Come, come, Miss Ivimpey, we are getting on by degrees! And may I ask you, pray, whether you are in the habit of allowing people whose names you don't know to have the *entrée* to your private office?"

In the eagerness of pursuit Mr. Peterson had slightly forgotten himself, and had overstepped the bounds of discretion.

"Sir, I will have no more of this!" cried Hugo Randolph, with an emphatic blow of his fist on the table. "You seem to forget that Miss Ivimpey is an old and valued friend of mine. Your style of cross-questioning is an insult, not merely to her, but to Miss Davenant also. It is almost equivalent to an insinuation that you suspect either one or the other of those ladies of having stolen your trumpery letter."

"There, Mr. Randolph, you do me an injustice. No such suspicion ever entered my head," said Mr. Peterson, flushing painfully under Hugo's words. "I was merely pursuing the inquiry in the ordinary way of my profession, and, as I think I may say, in the

interest of the community at large. The few questions I thought it necessary to put have already elicited the fact of another person having been in the office on the evening in question, who might——"

"I don't care if there were a hundred people there!" burst in Hugo hotly. "That is entirely Miss Ivimpey's business, and concerns neither you nor me. Besides, if half the town had been there, what possible motive could any one have had for taking the letter?"

"It might have been taken under the impression that it contained money," said the lawyer.

"It might, and it might not," said Hugo. "If one of the results of your profession, Mr. Peterson, is to beget a universal suspicion of your fellow-creatures, then am I thankful that I was not bred a lawyer."

"You have not seen quite so much of the dark side of human nature as I have, Mr. Randolph, or you would scarcely be as credulous as you are."

"*En revanche*, I have, perhaps, seen more of the bright side of human nature, and that has taught me the wisdom of charity."

"As regards what was said respecting my maid, Esther Sarel," said Miss Davenant, in her clear, cold tones, "you will, perhaps allow me a word of explanation."

"No explanation whatever is needed, Miss Davenant," said Hugo warmly.

"Still, if you will allow me," said Margaret. "Merely this: the girl called to see me while I was at the post-office on a matter of business. She was certainly not there more than five minutes altogether. She was standing close to me the whole of the time, and it was quite impossible for her to have taken either a letter or any other article without my knowledge. Further, I will pledge my word as to the girl's thorough honesty and trustworthiness; and, without considering the question of want of motive, I am perfectly convinced that the missing letter was not taken by Esther Sarel."

Hugo rose with a pained look on his handsome, bronzed face. "I hope those are the last words we shall hear about this wretched business," he said. "Mr. Peterson, if you attach the least value to my consideration, you will never let me hear another word about the missing letter. Miss Ivimpey, I am more grieved than I can tell you that the subject was ever broached in your presence, and I am certain that all here are perfectly convinced that the loss of the letter was the result of a pure accident, and that not even a shadow of blame can by any possibility attach to you in the matter. Tell Charley that I shall call and see him this afternoon before leaving."

Mr. Peterson, finding himself in the evening with an hour to spare before the departure of the train, sauntered into the smoking-room of the "Royal," bent on enjoying a weed. He found only one gentleman there, with whom he soon entered into conversation, and whom

he was not long in discovering to be Mr. Dawkins, the chief constable of Helsingham. Here was an opportunity for disburdening his mind such as must by no means be overlooked! The matter of the missing letter still remained on the lawyer's conscience, and he had just been longing for a sympathetic bosom into which he could pour his doubts and suspicions without running the risk of being snubbed as that odious Hugo Randolph had snubbed him. So the lawyer and the constable's heads were laid together, and an hour later Mr. Peterson took his departure, considerably comforted in his mind. Mr. Dawkins accompanied him to the train, and the constable's last words to the lawyer were: "There may be nothing in it, you know; but I'll keep my eyes open and drop you a line in case of anything turning up."

CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. BRUHN'S AMBITION.

It was with a feeling of almost solemn thankfulness that Margaret Davenant took her way back to Irongate House. She had been standing on the edge of a great peril,—on the verge of a pit invisible to all eyes but her own; but she had skirted it in safety, had left it behind her; and now, thank Heaven! the ground beneath her feet was firm and solid, and her heart was filled with silent gratitude.

Of Hugo Randolph she saw no more. He proceeded on his journey northward the same afternoon, after arranging with Mr. Peterson to meet that gentleman in London a few days later. Hugo the equable seemed in nowise elated by his unexpected good fortune. He saw his way now to fulfilling the two great longings of his life of which he had made mention to Mrs. Sutton; to wit, the shooting of lions in Algeria, and a trip to Norway in a yacht of his own; but beyond these two trifles, and the exchange of the *vin ordinaire*, to which the slenderness of his purse had hitherto condemned him, for claret of a choicer vintage, his simple mode of life would know no change. That he did not quite forget his Helsingham friends was proved a little while later by his sending Trix a set of handsome emerald and diamond ornaments as a wedding present, accompanied by a humorous little note addressed to "The fair Cousin whom I have never seen." With Trix's present came a ring set with opals and brilliants, of which he respectfully requested Miss Davenant's acceptance.

But there were others besides Hugo Randolph by whom our sweet Trix was not forgotten. A few evenings before the day fixed for the wedding Mr. Bruhn rode up to Irongate House, and sent in his card to Miss Davenant; and on being shown into the room where she and Trix were busily engaged with their needles, he announced himself as the bearer of a wedding present from his sister, Mrs. Cardale. Thereupon he placed in Trix's hands a tiny casket, which, on being

opened, was found to contain an exquisite little watch and chain, over which Trix at once went off into superlatives.

Mr. Bruhn had just returned from a short visit to the Continent, and Margaret was eager in her inquiries after Mrs. Cardale. "Her last words to me were these," said Mr. Bruhn: "'Tell Margaret Davenant that she must be ill for a month, and come out and join me. Tell her that I have no one here to argue with me or contradict me; no one with whom to discuss the last number of the 'Revue'; no one whose playing is worth listening to: tell her that if she does not come soon, I shall begin to write poetry in sheer despair.'"

"Mrs. Cardale knows too well the impossibility of what she asks," said Margaret, with a smile and a sigh. "Like the galley-slave of old, I am chained to my oar; and however lightly the servitude may weigh upon me, still, this is my spot, and here I must stay."

"Yes, it's just Etta all over," said Mr. Bruhn; "to think that everybody's duties and obligations should be subsidiary to her whims and wishes. She herself has been such a gad-about ever since she was a child, that she is quite incompetent to appreciate the quiet pleasures of our stay-at-home, humdrum English life."

"I will not hear even a whisper of slander against the absent," said Margaret, with a smile.

"A deeper frilling round this sleeve, dear, would be a decided improvement," said Miss Easterbrook, as she burst suddenly into the room. Mr. Bruhn, sitting close behind the door, was unperceived by her for the moment.

"Minerva never wore frills, my dear Miss Easterbrook; of that we may be very certain," said Mr. Bruhn, as he rose with extended hand; for between him and the preceptress of Irongate House there was an acquaintanceship of long standing; "and I am surprised to find one of her daughters unbending to the frivolities of modern fashion."

"Her ladyship lived before the age of French bonnets and distended skirts," answered Miss Easterbrook; "ere 'Le Follet' had become an institution, and while Glenfield starch was still a dream of the future; otherwise there is no knowing how many varieties of costume she might have introduced among the Olympians. Poor old lady! I dare say she was dreadfully moped at times in the company of those stupid gods and goddesses, whose education, in most cases, had been dreadfully neglected while they were young."

"It is hurtful to my feelings," said Mr. Bruhn, "to hear the friends of my school-days spoken of in that irreverent style. With your permission, therefore, I will retire."

"I must have come like a bird of ill-omen to frighten you away so soon," said Miss Easterbrook. "Only stay a little while, and I will initiate you into the mysteries of back-stitch and herring-bone; I will teach you how to hem your own handkerchiefs and darn your own socks; and now that you are about to become a legislator, every scrap of knowledge ought to be prized by you."

"Mr. Bruhn in Parliament!" said Margaret with genuine surprise.

"Yes, dear. Have you not seen to-day's 'Helsingham Gazette'?" said Miss Easterbrook. "But I forgot: local newspapers are beneath your notice. There, however, is the announcement; having read it twice over I know it by heart. 'We are informed, on excellent authority, that our eminent townsman, Mr. Robert Bruhn, has agreed to allow his name to be put forward as a candidate at the ensuing borough election. The political principles of Mr. Bruhn are too well known to need recapitulation in these columns.'"

"The fellow who wrote that paragraph," said Mr. Bruhn, "knows a great deal more about me than I do myself. In the first place, I am certainly not aware that I agreed to allow my name to be brought forward as a candidate, although I may have been solicited with that view. In the second place, my political opinions are by no means so well known to myself as they seem to be to my newspaper friend. I have an awkward faculty for seeing both sides of a question, which not infrequently disturbs the precision of a man's views. But, then, what is more easy for one who writes in utter ignorance than to say, 'The political opinions of Mr. Blank are too well known to need recapitulation'?"

"Mr. Bruhn is only trifling with us," said Margaret quietly. "He is like a bashful maiden of seventeen, who will and who will not; who means her No to be taken as Yes, and who would think her wooer a very stupid fellow indeed if he put too literal a construction upon her timid negatives."

"Even you can misjudge me," said Mr. Bruhn, turning on Margaret a little reproachfully. "Your simile is a very pretty one, but totally inapplicable in the present case. No," he resumed, more earnestly than he had yet spoken, "the offer comes to me too late in life; I have no longer any ambition left to shine in public. Yet, I may here confess that when I was a young man just setting out in life, I looked forward to a seat in Parliament as the Mussulman looks forward to one day visiting Mecca. It was the corner-stone of my ambition—the great purpose of my life—a prize worth struggling for. It was a pleasant dream while it lasted; but it fell away from me like a worn-out garment the day I buried my wife and child in one grave, and found myself left shivering and alone to begin the world afresh; and I have never had the heart since that time to pick up the ragged old thing and try it on again."

"But all that happened a long, long time ago," said Margaret; "and sorrow knows no surer anodynes than the gentle touch of Time's merciful finger, and the exercise of a healthy and honest ambition."

"Sorrow, in the ordinary sense of the word, I know no longer," said Mr. Bruhn; "only a sweet and chastened memory, that seems to draw my erring feet heavenward when they might otherwise go astray. But a little worm has been preying too long at the core of the fruit for it ever to be sound again."

"What would this world be like," urged Margaret, "if all of us who have given pledges to eternity were to allow the smarts of our wounds to stay with us for ever?"

"If you were to preach till the millennium, my dear Miss Davenant, you could not destroy the individuality of suffering," said Mr. Bruhn. "We must each of us carry our own burden our own way. The great sorrow of my life has left me neither a hermit nor a misanthrope; it has merely rendered me disinclined to move out of the every-day groove in which I have travelled my mill-horse round for so many years, and which I have come at last to enjoy in a quiet fashion that feels no need of a change. I can enjoy my horse, and my book, and my pipe, and the society of a few choice friends; I can enjoy my daily drudgery at the mill, tedious though it may seem to an outsider; and latterly, by way of mild dissipation, and as a means of taking me more out of myself, I have begun to dip my finger in the municipal pie, and to study the question of borough reform."

"And are the triumphs of a Little Pedlington like ours really sufficient to satisfy your ambition?" asked Margaret.

"Yes, really sufficient," answered Mr. Bruhn; "although it by no means follows that I attach any particular value to such triumphs. Cannot you see that they serve to give a variety to my life just sufficient to keep me off the edge of *ennui?* And that is all I care for nowadays."

He rose to go, and as his hand touched that of Beatrice at parting, he slipped a little packet into it. "With the giver's best wishes for your future health and happiness," he said; and next moment he was gone. The packet on being opened was found to contain a handsome and costly bracelet.

CHAPTER XXX.

KNOTTINGLY BEECHES.

THE day fixed for Trix's wedding was drawing on apace, and in Irongate House the preparations for the important ceremony went forward (*sub rosâ*) as merrily as such preparations always ought to do. Miss Easterbrook chuckled to herself to think how capitally the secret had been kept, and that the wedding-day would come and go almost without her giddy fledglings being aware that it differed in any way from the ordinary days of school-girl existence. Beyond the immediate circle of those concerned, Mrs. Greene, the housekeeper, was the only person to whom she had spoken of it, and only to her under the seal of secrecy. But Mrs. Greene had seen no harm in mentioning the fact to Madame Schmidt, the German governess—always under the aforesaid seal of secrecy—and the secret once known to Madame Schmidt, soon became the common property of the establishment.

When the eventful morning really did arrive, if Miss Easterbrook

thought to deceive her young ladies with the transparent excuse that both she and Miss Davenant were called away on most important business, she was miserably mistaken. Authentic information had been furnished as to the precise hour the carriages would leave Irongate House on their way to church. Exactly five minutes before that time, at a signal given by Captain Lucy Dampier in one room, and by Lieutenant Sarah Stevens in another, the girls rose in a body, and, to the intense astonishment of Mademoiselle Perrin and Madame Schmidt, who had been left in charge, they proceeded to form in procession, two abreast, and began to defile out of the class-rooms.

"Vat you about, young ladies?" cried the French teacher, planting herself full in the way of the first battalion. "To your lessons this moment!"

"Now, Perrin, don't you interfere, or it will be worse for you!" cried Captain Dampier sternly. "Stand on one side, I say, or I will give instructions to have you locked up in the book-room."

Miss Dampier was the eldest girl in the school, and a great heiress to boot, and her imperious words cowed the poor teacher. She stood meekly on one side, and let the procession go past without further protest, while Schmidt subsided into tears and a helpless wringing of hands. So the procession went on its way steadily, defiling down the old oak staircase, and out by the side door, and round by the screen of laurels, and halted at the main entrance to Irongate House, half on one side and half on the other. Then, in obedience to the word of command, the lesser girls took up a position in front, and the taller ones in the rear, so that all could see equally well. Scarcely had the rear rank formed in close order when the bridal party from the house —Miss Easterbrook, Margaret, Mr. Davenant, and the bride, together with two young ladies (names not recorded) who acted as bridesmaids —on their way to the carriages, drawn up a few yards away. Miss Easterbrook was literally too astounded to speak. She turned first red and then white—that is to say, as white as her rubicund visage could become on so short a notice—and then hurried into the carriage to hide her confusion. Just as the bride came stepping out, leaning on her father's arm, sweet little Minna Ashleigh, the fairy of the school, attired for the occasion in her best bib and tucker, carrying an elegant bouquet, was thrust forward; and with a pretty little courtesy, held out her bunch of flowers for the bride's acceptance, saying, as she did so, "From the young ladies of Irongate House with their love and best wishes."

Trix took the flowers, and stooped and kissed the giver, but just then her heart was so full that she could not say a word in reply.

Much waving of handkerchiefs, and quite a storm of good wishes, followed the bride as she stepped into the carriage; after which Miss Easterbrook's pupils went decorously back to their duties in the class-room.

At the wedding-breakfast, which was given by Mrs. Sutton at her

house, Mr. Davenant made a highly-ornate speech, into which he introduced several choice flowers of rhetoric, culled from a work of the Johnsonian period, by which he set great store. It was a speech that was much admired by all the ladies present (except, perhaps, by Margaret), and Miss Easterbrook was affected by it to tears. More tears were shed, we may be sure, when the hour for parting came, and bride and bridegroom set out for a six weeks' tour on the Continent, Hugh's patients, meanwhile, being looked after by a brother practitioner, by whom he had acted a similar part only a year previously.

A week before the wedding-day, Charlotte Herne left Helsingham on a visit to an old schoolfellow, with the promise that she would come back before the return of Hugh and his wife, and, in conjunction with Mrs. Sutton, have everything in readiness for their reception.

The social timepiece can point to few times and seasons more flat and insipid than the half-dozen hours immediately following a wedding-breakfast. The pretty little drama ends with the departure of the happy couple and the dispersion of the wedding-guests; and you are thrown on your own resources for the remainder of a day round which a festive odour seems still to cling, so that you cannot make up your mind to tone it down to the prosaic level of your ordinary workaday life, the result of your wish to keep up the character of the day being generally a wretched anticlimax. To Margaret Davenant, however, this day of her sister's marriage had not seemed to wear a particularly festive aspect. Although her scheme for winning Trix a rich husband had miscarried, she yet could not help rejoicing in Trix's marriage—rejoicing that she had found a man so good and true for her husband, and that she was rescued from the life of anxious drudgery that had been her own portion for so many years. But there was another side to the question. She had but just learnt to know how sweet it was to have her sister with her when she was taken from her. Trix could never again be to her exactly what she had been. A new home, with new duties and obligations, awaited her sister; and the old sweet intimacy between them could never again be renewed in all its completeness.

This melancholy mood was still upon her when she took her way homeward from the railway-station on the afternoon of the wedding-day. She had been to see Mr. Davenant off by train, and now that he was gone, she felt even more lonely than before. She felt as if a long country walk would do her good; so, instead of going back through the town, she skirted its northern suburb, taking a footpath through the fields, and crossing the river by the long wooden bridge, and then up the hill to the left, not two hundred yards from Brook Lodge. A short half-mile further brought her to Knottingly Beeches, one of the prettiest walks near Helsingham. It was merely a winding woodland path that skirted the summit of a ridge of rising ground, with here and there a patch of timber cut away so as to afford a view of the town and of the pretty valley in which it was built, and, beyond that, of a

swelling range of pasture-lands that swept up to the horizon and shut out all the world beyond.

When Margaret had reached the highest point, she sat down on a rustic seat to rest and admire the view. All the gentle influences of nature seemed to be abroad, and little by little the sadness was drawn out of Margaret's heart and a feeling of chastened content took its place. If happiness, in the ordinary acceptation of the word, could never be hers, at least the paths of life were not quite barren to her footsteps. Affection and Friendship walked with her side by side, and Duty, severely beautiful, pointed out the way she must go. Eros, the darling boy, would pass her by and know her not; Love's fine frenzy would be to her as a madman's dream; for her there would be no voyaging out into unknown seas, with danger of heartwreck and cozenage of brightest hopes; but, instead, the shaded garden-paths of Pallas Athene, and quiet anchorage where the storms of life could harm her not.

Margaret was still deep in these musings, and had become utterly oblivious of time and place, when she was suddenly startled by some one speaking close behind her.

"Miss Davenant!"

Mr. Bruhn's voice! And there Mr. Bruhn was in person, with frank smile and outstretched hand, when she rose in some confusion to greet him. They shook hands cordially. Margaret inquired the last news respecting her friend Mrs. Cardale, and before she was aware that she had stirred from the spot where Mr. Bruhn had come upon her, she found herself walking slowly along the footpath that led in the direction of Irongate House, which was, however, fully two miles away, with that gentleman by her side.

"This is a favourite haunt of mine," said Mr. Bruhn, as they sauntered along together; "but my visits to it are generally made by starlight or moonlight. Whenever the weather is at all endurable, I like a short ramble and a cigar before turning in for the night; and, at such a time, this is at once the loveliest and the most unfrequented spot within an easy walk of my house."

"I have been here but three or four times before," said Margaret. "My usual walk is at the opposite side of the town, and it was more by accident than design that I took this road to-day."

"A happy accident, seeing that to it I owe the pleasure of meeting you. But this is your sister's wedding-day; is it not?"

"It is. I parted from her only two hours ago. She is on her way to Paris by this time."

"Although she has not been long with you, yet to lose her will seem to leave a gap in your life for some time to come."

"Yes. To-day has seemed anything rather than a day of rejoicing to me. But I try to forget my own melancholy in looking forward to the happy future which I trust is in store for her."

"She deserves to be happy," said Mr. Bruhn, "and that she will be

so, I do not doubt. There is not a better fellow breathing than Hugh Randolph, nor a man whom I esteem more highly."

There were tears in Margaret's dark eyes as she turned them full on Mr. Bruhn with a look that showed how deeply his words had touched her. For a little while they walked on without speaking.

All at once Margaret turned on Mr. Bruhn with a glad, bright look on her face, such as he had rarely seen there before. A grave serenity, overlaid by a faint, indefinable melancholy, was Margaret's prevailing characteristic; but that sudden flush of gladness, like the lifting of a rain-cloud behind which the sun is shining, betrayed for a moment the radiant depths beyond.

"We are to see you in Parliament, after all, Mr. Bruhn!" she said. "I felt so glad this morning when the news was told me."

"Your news is news to me," said Mr. Bruhn. "It is true that I have, at length, agreed to contest the borough at the forthcoming election; but it by no means follows that I shall be the successful candidate. But granting for the moment that I were secure of my seat, why should that fact be a source of pleasure to you?"

Margaret's colour deepened visibly at the question, but she replied with a sweet, grave earnestness of manner that could hardly fail to impress the man to whom she spoke. "The news I heard this morning," she said, "was a source of pleasure to me, because I believe that in Parliament you will be in your proper sphere. I hardly know how it happens, Mr. Bruhn, that I venture to talk to you at all on these matters, which we poor women are supposed to be utterly ignorant of. But I am merely saying to you what I have said more than once to Mrs. Cardale. It seems to me that the ambition of a man such as you are can never be satisfied in a place like Helsingham. To be the head of an extensive business establishment, to take your share of municipal duties and dignities, are, doubtless, worthy triumphs in their way; but yours is an intellect that requires a larger arena for its display, and opponents more worthy of your strength and skill. If I have spoken too freely, I can only trust to your kindness to forgive me."

"You have not spoken too freely," said Mr. Bruhn emphatically. "Be assured that I esteem you none the less for what you have said to-day. It is true that of late the promptings of an ambition that I thought had died within me long years ago have made themselves felt. Sometimes I resolve to give way to them; more often I ask myself *cui bono?*—shrug my shoulders, light my cigar, and turn a deaf ear to the voices that try to beguile me from the quiet, unambitious path I have trodden for so many years."

"But you have at length cast mistrust to the winds, and agreed to run the race that is set before you?" said Margaret.

"Yes, I have so agreed," said Mr. Bruhn. "But, Margaret—" (it was the first time he had called her by her Christian name, and the implied familiarity caused Miss Davenant to shrink involuntarily a

foot or two further away from the speaker). "But, Margaret," he repeated, "that race, as it seems to me, will be a difficult one to run alone. Will you lighten it for me? Will you become my wife?"

If an earthquake had caused the ground to open at the feet of Margaret Davenant, she could not have been more surprised than she was at hearing these words. "Oh, Mr. Bruhn, you cannot surely be in earnest!" she said.

"But I am most terribly in earnest," answered Mr. Bruhn. "In all my life I was never more sincere than I am at this moment. This is no mere idle fancy of mine. For months past it has been the fixed thought of my mind to say what I have said to-day; and I should have spoken to you long ago only that I was determined to prove to myself by waiting that my liking, my affection for you was no mere passing whim of a day or an hour."

"I find it difficult to believe that I am really here," murmured Margaret, "and that you are really addressing such words to me."

"You are really here, and I, Robert Bruhn, am truly and in all sincerity asking you, Margaret Davenant, to become my wife. I ask you to join your life to mine; to share my heart and my home. I shall love you very dearly (indeed, I do that already), not, perhaps, with the wild, madcap love of youth, but with that quiet devotion which maturer years should bring if our lives have not been wholly misspent; and I will try my best to make you happy."

"What can I say?" said Margaret. "Indeed, I know not what to say. I fully appreciate the honour you have done me, but——" and Margaret paused.

"You must not talk like that," said Mr. Bruhn gently, "or I shall begin to fear for the success of my suit. But I will not press you for an immediate answer. Take what time you please to think over my proposal, and then write me a single word—Yes or No. Only, it must not—it must not be the latter."

"You are very, very kind!" said Margaret, and then she sighed. "But what would Mrs. Cardale think? and your fashionable friends?"

"My fashionable friends may go to Jericho! They will not hinder me from making myself happy my own way. And as for Etta,—I have a letter from her in my pocket applauding me to the echo for what I am now doing. Etta has known my thoughts and feelings in this matter all along She will welcome you as a sister with more than an ordinary sister's love."

Again Margaret sighed. Tears were in her eyes, and when she tried to speak she could not. They had left Knottingly Beeches some distance behind, and had walked slowly through the fields beyond it, and had now reached the stile which gave admission into the high-road. There, as by mutual consent, they halted. Mr. Bruhn's way lay back again through the fields, Margaret's lay along the high-road in the direction of Irongate House.

A moment or two they stood thus without speaking. Margaret's

eyes were bent on the ground, Mr. Bruhn's were bent on her. At length Margaret raised her eyes to his, and held out her hand, while her lips shaped an inaudible Good-bye.

"You will write to me, will you not?" asked Mr. Bruhn, as he took her hand, and after holding it for an instant in his, raised it respectfully to his lips.

"Yes, I will write to you," said Margaret. With that she let her veil drop over her face, turned and crossed the stile, and went on her way home.

CHAPTER XXXI.

YES, OR NO?

MARGARET DAVENANT walked home as a woman in a dream. There was a vague dread upon her that all that had happened to her during the last half-hour was a mere delusion of her own disordered brain. It was almost too incredible for belief that after all these years of toil and neglect and penury, she should be asked to become the wife of a man like Robert Bruhn. Her deep thankfulness—as yet it could not be called happiness—was so extreme that she felt she must seek the relief of tears. On reaching home she made her way unnoticed to her own room, and there, on her knees, she cried for a long time, and so relieved her overburdened heart. Then, still kneeling, she fell asleep, with her head resting against a corner of the bed,—for the day's excitement had utterly worn her out,—and so slept for above an hour. Then she rose quietly, and bathed her hands and face, and went down into the class-room, and heard the young ladies their lessons, and set them their tasks for the morrow. There was about her this afternoon a sort of solemn elation which shone through all she said and did.

After a solitary cup of tea in her own room Margaret went out into the shrubbery. The huge clumps of evergreens looked dim and solemn in the growing dusk. Margaret threaded her way through them till she reached her favourite walk under the sheltering southern wall. As she went along she plucked a late rose that had been making love to one of the stars, and imprisoned it in the bosom of her dress. To her pleased fancy it seemed as if the gathered flower was emblematic of the sweetness and beauty that were henceforth to gather round her life and fill her days with a gladness such as they had never known before. As yet she had not stated positively to herself whether her answer should be Yes, or No; but all her thoughts and imaginings hinged on the supposition of her reply being in the affirmative.

From the moment of her introduction to Mr. Bruhn, Margaret had felt a strong liking and respect for him, but now she felt something that was warmer than either. Only three hours had come and gone since he had asked her to become his wife, yet already he was nearer and dearer to her than all the world besides,—her father and Trix

excepted ; her love for them nothing could change. But this was an altogether different sentiment from love of father or sister, this delicious insidious something that was stealing like a subtle poison through her veins.

"Surely I am not going to fall in love at my time of life!" said Margaret to herself. Then she smelled at her rose, kissed it, and smiled.

To and fro she paced the garden walk till long after the autumn twilight had deepened into night. Through the midst of her musings respecting this new future that might be her own for a word, one thought would come uppermost with troublesome frequency, let her strive as she would to crush it low down into her heart ; and that thought was, "If I marry Mr. Bruhn, I shall never know poverty again." Had her life depended on it, she could not have utterly stifled this thought. As the mistress of Brook Lodge, and the wife of the richest man in Helsingham, what a very different personage she would be from the shabby-genteel Miss Davenant of Irongate House ! She and Poverty had been too well acquainted for many years for her to be frightened at his sour visage ; but, for all that, her longings, tastes, and instincts were for the luxuries and refinements of life,—for those refinements which wealth alone can purchase. Living as she was now, and as she had lived since she was eighteen years old, she was like a plant pining neglected in some unsheltered nook, whose proper place would have been to deck some gay parterre and revel in the sun. At length the opportunity was offered her of entering that sphere which by birth, tastes, and education she was so well fitted to adorn, and, with a thrill of pride in her power, she felt that she *could* adorn it. Her father, too ! It would be within her power, as it would be her happiness, to lift him out of his present condition of genteel pauperism, and surround his declining years with some of those elegant comforts which no one was better fitted than he to appreciate and enjoy. It was only that very morning that she, Margaret, had been debating in her own mind whether she could afford herself a new shawl, and in a few weeks from that time she might, were she so willed, be riding in her own carriage, and have a dozen servants at her beck and call. It was like a pretty story out of the Arabian Nights which one reads with a smile, knowing that it can in nowise be true.

But all her musings of this evening were pervaded by a faint chilling sense of her own unworthiness. Had she not committed a crime which, if it were known to Mr. Bruhn, would at once change his affection into loathing, and cause him to shun her as though she were a moral leper whom it would be pollution to touch ? Was not that accursed stolen letter in her possession at that very moment ? And knowing this, could she, with unsullied conscience, go and wed this true and honourable gentleman, who believed in her as implicitly as he believed in his own sister ? With an unsullied conscience, as she at

once confessed, she could not do this thing. But, for all that, she *would* do it; she would be Mrs. Robert Bruhn, of Brook Lodge! The one crime of her life had harmed no one but herself; it had utterly failed to compass the end intended; to her its fruit had been nothing but despair, tears, and repentance; but now that it was so completely a thing of the past, so entirely her own secret that the world could never, by any possibility, become cognizant of it, would it not be the height of folly to allow its grim shadow—and it was nothing more tangible than a shadow—to frighten her back from the threshold of that pleasant future which had opened so unexpectedly before her? "Folly, indeed!" she said to herself aloud, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Is my whole future to be influenced by the mistake of a moment? Am I to refrain from plucking the golden apple that hangs within reach of my hand because of the tiny speck at its core? Not so."

Next morning Margaret despatched a little note to Mr. Bruhn—a very brief note indeed—which, without decisively answering that gentleman's question either one way or the other, was not without a certain hopeful significance, which the recipient of it did not fail to recognize. Its contents were simply—

"Come. Seven P.M.
"MARGARET."

As seven o'clock was striking, Mr. Bruhn reached the top of the rising ground on which Irongate House was situated, and the same moment Miss Davenant issued from the gates. After shaking hands, Mr. Bruhn offered his arm, which Margaret took, and together they turned up a quiet country lane leading out of the main road, which might have been a dozen miles from any town, so utterly deserted was it in the dusk of this pleasant September evening. A sense of happy trust and confidence shed itself like balm over the heart of Margaret, as her hand rested lightly within the stalwart arm of the man who had asked her to become his wife. She had been so accustomed all her life to independent action, to think and decide everything without consulting any one, that this new sense of leaning upon another, so dear to the feminine mind—of having some one in whom she could confide and on whose stronger will she could safely rely was, to her, simply delicious. Now, too, as she glanced quietly up at her companion, she seemed to see him with new eyes. His hair and beard might be slightly grizzled; that fact only added to the nobility of his appearance. But what a fine chivalric head was his!—a head that seemed made for casque or morion, or that would have served admirably as a model for that of Sir Bedivere or some other gentle Knight of the Table Round.

"I am here at your bidding," said Mr. Bruhn, as they reached the friendly shade of overarching boughs, which made the twilight deeper, and seemed to draw them closer to each other. "You have something to say to me."

"I have," said Margaret.

"Something you wish me to hear before you decide a certain question which I put to you yesterday evening. I judged as much from your note. Once upon a time then——"

And Mr. Bruhn paused, and, in the pause, Margaret felt her hand pressed gently and reassuringly, as if to give her courage.

"Once upon a time," began Margaret, "there was a poor gentleman named Davenant, who had two daughters, the elder of whom was asked in marriage by a prince of a neighbouring country. Before agreeing to accept the offer of this prince she thought it only right that he should know certain particulars of her previous history with which he was entirely unacquainted. But I can't go on in this way, Mr. Bruhn," added Margaret, with a little laugh. "I must tell my story after my own fashion."

"That is to say, after the pleasantest fashion possible."

So Margaret told the story of her life—told of the sudden downfall of her father, long years before, from wealth to poverty; told of his enforced flight from England; how he had lived abroad for many years, and how his present occupation was that of second violin in the Theatre Royal, Wellingford. All this she told without imputing a shadow of blame to her father, leading her hearer to understand that all Mr. Davenant's misfortunes had resulted from causes entirely outside his personal control, for nothing had ever shaken Margaret's love for her father. Then, in a few words, she sketched her own career during all those weary years that had come and gone since the breaking up of her home. She concealed nothing from Mr. Bruhn save that ugly business of the purloined letter, but concerning that she was as silent as the grave.

When she had done speaking, Mr. Bruhn walked on in silence for a moment or two, then he stopped; then, taking Margaret by the hand, he said, "Is that all you have to urge as a reason for not becoming my wife?"

"That is all," replied Margaret, in a low voice.

"Then you might have saved yourself the trouble of such a confession. Or, rather, you could not have invented anything that would have done so much towards increasing my affection for you—if any increase of it were possible—than the plain narrative of facts I have just heard from your lips. So now, for the second time, I ask you, Margaret Davenant, whether you will be my wife?"

"I will—God willing," said Margaret.

"For life and death?"

"For life and death."

"Amen!" said Mr. Bruhn; and with that he drew Margaret's face gently towards his, and kissed her twice.

(*To be continued.*)

A LOYAL HEART.

By F. M. F. Skene.

I.

IN the midst of a richly-wooded valley near the south coast of England there stands an old grey stone house, which not many years ago was the home of a somewhat strangely assorted family.

It is a beautiful summer evening, and they are all assembled on the lawn outside the drawing-room windows, so that we can examine their appearance at our leisure and note their peculiar characteristics. They have a claim upon our interest such as the touch of nature and reality alone can give, for we are not about to describe fictitious personages, but human beings who lived in this mortal world and played their part in the drama we have to unfold.

The most conspicuous figure in the group is a lady about forty-five years of age, and a very noble-looking woman. Her portrait as she was at that date is before us now, and we can trace her lineaments from it: an open, intellectual brow, finely-cut features and clear grey eyes; a face combining strength and sweetness in a notable degree. She is tall and fair, a most unquestionable type of the Saxon race; yet she bears a foreign name, and is known in Spain—the country of her husband—as the Señora de Vilalta.

The venerable old man who sits in an arm-chair by her side calls her "Christine," however; and the strong likeness between them leaves no room for doubt that they are father and daughter.

General Wyndham is an old cavalry officer; an Englishman in every fibre, in every thought and feeling; and it had been a source of great regret to him, years before, when his only child at the age of nineteen married a young attaché of the Spanish embassy, and left her early home to follow the varying fortunes of her husband in many distant lands. Only at rare intervals had she been able to return to the old Manor House, where her father had finally established himself when age compelled him to retire from the service; and on the present occasion she was staying with him for a few weeks while M. de Vilalta, who had recently been appointed Spanish minister in Paris, was absent on a special mission in Egypt.

Both the General and his daughter have their eyes fixed on her two sons, who are walking together on the grass at some little distance engaged in earnest conversation. They are fine-looking young men, about three-and-twenty years of age; but it is hard to believe that they are twin brothers, so absolutely unlike each other are they in

every point of their personal appearance. They seem indeed to represent the nationality of their parents in a remarkable degree. Ernest is the taller, and looks an unmistakable Englishman; fair-haired, grey-eyed like his mother, with her frank, resolute expression, slightly tinctured, as it is in her case also, by a touch of haughtiness, and with the erect military bearing which was still a characteristic of his stalwart old grandfather.

Ferdinand has the appearance of being older than his brother; more slenderly built, while active and athletic in all his movements, with raven-black hair, large flashing eyes of the same hue, and a clear olive complexion. He is strikingly handsome, and Ernest was wont to say, laughingly, that no one ever cast a glance on him if Ferdinand were anywhere near.

Their sister Elvira, a brilliant-looking maiden of seventeen, who is flitting from place to place gathering flowers, is exactly like her Spanish-looking brother. The same dark hair, crowned at this moment with a wreath of red roses she has chosen to weave for herself, the same beautiful eyes and mobile expression, and in more delicate form the same supple, graceful figure, clad in gay-coloured robes, which give her somewhat the appearance of a gorgeous butterfly as she darts out and in among the trees.

One other figure there is in this family group entirely unlike any of those we have described, and yet exceptionally fair and attractive.

A young girl is seated apart from the rest under the shade of an old oak tree; a girl with an angel face, as Ferdinand Vilalta often said to himself while he gazed at her with all the strong love of his passionate heart glowing in his eyes. There is scarce a tinge of colour on the sweet pure countenance save in the rose-bud lips; her large eyes are of the limpid blue which is only seen in the morning sky, and a cloud of soft brown hair falls back from her broad open forehead. Her expression is calm and serious for one so young, and her thoughtful gaze is bent on a large book which lies on her knees. A huge dog of the St. Bernard breed couches at her feet, one of his massive paws is laid on the long folds of her white dress, as if to secure that she does not move without his permission; but his head is turned towards the two young men, whose every movement he follows with the closest attention.

Alba Wyndham is the orphan child of the General's favourite nephew. Her father and mother had come to make their home with him when he retired from the army, in order to save him from the loneliness to which his daughter's absence would have condemned him; but they had both died within a few months of each other, leaving their lovely, gentle child to be the joy and consolation of the old man's declining years. She had received the name of Alberta at her baptism; but the word "Alba" seemed so singularly appropriate, both to her appearance and to her mental characteristics, that she was never called by any other.

It is not on her, however, that General Wyndham is gazing now, but on his two grandsons, as, arm in arm, they pace to and fro.

"They are fine lads, Christine," said the General, examining them critically, "and I am proud of them, for all they bear a foreign name and were brought up on stranger soil; yet Ernest is my favourite, for he has chosen my own profession, which I hold to be the finest in the world. I am glad, with all my heart, that he has not followed in his brother's steps."

"There was no risk of that," said Christine. "Ernest could never have taken any other line—he is a born soldier; I suppose he must have inherited the taste from you. Yet I never encouraged him till I was quite certain it was not a mere childish fancy. You know Vilalta has always left the education and general management of the children entirely to me; he has been too completely absorbed in his diplomatic duties, and too often absent from us altogether, to be able to watch over their interests. Ernest's desire became so marked that I felt I had no right to thwart his wish to go to Berlin and enter as cadet at the great institution which is so renowned for turning out the most splendid officers. As you know, he has gone through the whole course of the hard regimental discipline with steady determination, advancing step by step, till you see him now, young as he still is, a lieutenant in the Prussian cavalry corps. It was the fact of his having a few weeks' furlough that decided me to come over to England and pay you a visit at once. I wanted you to make acquaintance with him as a full-blown soldier—he was but a boy when you saw him last."

"You have given me the very greatest pleasure," exclaimed the General; "yet I do not half like his being in the Prussian service. He has nothing on earth to do with that country, which is neither yours nor your husband's. Why, if the Germans went to war he would have to fight with them, even if they were in arms against England!

"There is no fear of that," said Christine; "we are on very friendly terms with Germany; and Ernest fully intends to enter the army of Spain, his own country, as soon as he has gone through the different grades necessary for a complete knowledge of his profession. It was simply for the admirable training that he entered the Prussian service."

"True," returned the General; "and even if he were to remain among the Germans all his life, I should be better satisfied than if he had taken to a diplomatic career like his brother."

"Yet that profession suits Fernan remarkably well," said Christine. "He is exceptionally shrewd and clever, and has many of the qualities necessary for that peculiar work; his father finds him extremely useful as attaché to his own embassy. If I live long enough, I hope to see him an ambassador like Vilalta himself some day, though I would rather have him anywhere than in Paris.

"Paris," she continued, with animation, "is always in a state of

excitement from one cause or another. How different my temporary home there is to this quiet scene!" looking round on the beautiful grounds which surrounded the old Manor House, lit up at the moment by the soft sunset glow. "That dear Alba might represent the very spirit of peace as she sits there in her snow-white robes. Ernest often speaks of her 'forget-me-not eyes,' because he says they are just the colour of that significant little flower."

"Ah! she is only 'a little lower than the angels,'" quoted the General, glancing fondly at his adopted daughter. "I should not wonder if both your boys were in love with her, Christine. I do not see how they could well help it."

"Oh, I hope not both!" said the mother hastily, though a slight fear on the subject had been lurking for some time in her mind. "There cannot be any doubt of Fernan's admiration, but I trust Ernest only feels towards her as a brother might."

"Well, they must settle it among themselves," said the General; "she will have my blessing with her wherever she goes."

At that moment a servant appeared on the steps leading from the front door, and crossing the lawn, delivered a telegram to Ernest. The brothers paused and together looked on the brief words of a foreign despatch so soon as it was opened. Then startled exclamations burst from the lips of both, and Ernest flew over the grass to the spot where Christine was seated, holding the ominous paper before her eyes.

"Look!" he said, excitedly. "Do you see what it says? War is declared between France and Prussia; the whole army is under arms, and I am summoned to rejoin my regiment."

Yes! it was indeed the terrible message which rang as the death-knell of thousands upon thousands through the whole of Europe one fatal day, and which still echoes mournfully in many a home made desolate thereby, though some twenty years have come and gone since then. It pierced the mother's heart of her who looked on that fair stalwart youth, radiant in health and strength, as he stood flushed and eager before her, holding in his hand the order which called him to the deadly battle-field. Her face blanched and her lips trembled, courageous woman as she was.

The General started forward.

"Is war really proclaimed?" he cried. "Hurrah! My boy, you'll go into action now and learn what it means to be a soldier. You will see some splendid fighting, and it will be the making of you, though I wish with all my heart you were not going to fight for an alien country. I could see you risk your life with satisfaction for England or even for Spain, but Prussia has no sort of claim on you."

"Yes, it has, grandfather," said Ernest, smiling; "it has given me my education as a soldier, and I am bound to its service for the moment. It is the cause of duty and honour, so far as I am concerned, and I cannot delay even an instant in responding to

the call. Mother, I must go by the next train," he added, his voice softening. "Will you come with me while I get my kit ready? I have not more than half an hour to do it in."

"My boy—must you go to-night?" said Christine, her voice faltering. "Is there no appeal? So be it, then, my son. I will not hinder you another moment."

"The time is so short for preparing my luggage," said Ernest, "I think I must take leave of you all now and not come out here again. Mother and Fernan will come and help me to pack. Grandfather, I know I shall have your blessing," he continued, bending his handsome head before the old man, who laid his hand upon it fondly.

"You shall have it, indeed, my boy, now and always, till my name comes, as soon it must, on the roll-call of death. The Lord of Hosts be with you; the God of my fathers guard and keep you."

He sank back in his chair as he spoke, for at his great age he was little able to bear any emotion; and his daughter, fearing its effect on his health, drew Ernest gently away.

Ernest then passed on towards Alba, who had risen to her feet and was standing like a fair statue cut in white marble, with her hand on the head of the great dog, whose large brown eyes were fixed on the young soldier.

It was then that Ferdinand, with a wildly beating heart, drew near to watch this special leave-taking. He thought that he might gather some indication from it as to the feelings really subsisting between those two. He had loved Alba Wyndham, from the first moment he had looked on her sweet angelic face, with the passionate ardour of his whole being; and the close intercourse of the last few weeks, when they had dwelt day after day in that old Manor House together, had intensified his absorbing affection, till he felt that earth could have for him no other hope or dream save only to win her sooner or later to be his own. Yet he had said no word to her or to any one of this complete surrender of the whole happiness of his life into her hands; for, although she had gained indeed the whole worship of his maturer manhood, he was still faithful to the earlier love that had brightened his existence from the first dawn of consciousness, and a deadly fear lay curdling like ice around his heart that Alba was perhaps as passionately dear to his twin brother as to himself—the object of Ernest's fondest hopes as much as of his own. Could it be otherwise, he had asked himself many times during those weeks which they had spent in her presence, charmed ever by the strange loveliness of her rare smile, or the soft tones of her voice, that seemed to Fernan sweet as heavenly music. Could any man look on Alba Wyndham and not feel that she was the one peerless gift for which he must long above all others?

Fernan, in his loyal devotion to his brother, had resolved that he would rigidly conceal the absorbing love that dominated his whole being till he knew how it fared with Ernest. He had not as yet been able to

gain any clear indication of the secret feelings either of his brother or of Alba herself. Surely this would be a crucial moment, when they were about to part, possibly to meet no more. Fernan's eager eyes devoured the group as Ernest drew near to the young girl and took her hand.

"The sad moment has come very quickly, Alba," he said, "and I must not linger for many words. Will you be true to your forget-me-not eyes, and remember me sometimes?"

"Always," she said gently, lifting the beautiful blue orbs to his face.

He bent his head and whispered low that his mother might not hear the words, though Fernan's quick ear caught them.

"You know that I am going into deadly peril, and we may never meet again. Alba, I shall have your prayers?"

"Yes," she replied, simply; "but you shall have also what is far better." She put into his hands the little black-bound Testament out of which she had been reading. "This will speak to you ever of the Captain of your salvation. He will watch over His soldier on the battle-fields of earth."

Ernest took the book, kissing the little white fingers that held it in silence, and then without another word walked quietly into the house. Ferdinand followed, feeling that he had learned nothing whatever from this brief interview.

II.

It is on a very different scene from the pleasant garden of the English Manor House that Ernest Vilalta is gazing when we see him a few months later.

Nothing remains to him of that dear home, and the friends that were around him there, save only the great dog that had been lying at Alba Wyndham's feet on the memorable evening when the war tidings fell like a thunderbolt on the family party. Leo had always belonged to Ernest from the days of his puppyhood, and adored him with the faithful devotion of which dogs of his calibre are often capable. He had been with him through all his years of military training, and in the peaceful days when there was no call to active service he had seemed to form a part of the regiment, and had been wont to walk with a stately step in front of the band whenever they were marching from place to place. During the time of Ernest's visit to his grandfather before the war broke out, the dog had seemed strangely attracted to Alba Wyndham, and, when not required by his master, always took up a station near her. Ferdinand used to say that it reminded him of Una and her lion; and certainly it was a pretty sight to see the slender white-robed girl moving along with her quiet, graceful step, while the huge animal paced majestically by her side.

Since then, however, he had followed the fortunes of his master through the series of terrible battles which had proved fatal to France

—from the first half-doubtful victory of Saarbruck, when the young Prince Imperial—reserved for a darker fate years after in Zululand—had been said by his father to have received his "baptism of fire," to that historic day on the sanguinary field of Sedan, when the defeated discrowned Emperor yielded himself a prisoner to the Prussian King.

Ernest had not passed unscathed through all that awful time. He had twice been slightly wounded; but, with indomitable courage, had made light of his injuries and returned as soon as possible to his active duties. The tremendous struggle was far from being over, though the French Empire had vanished away to swell the list of earth's vain departed glories. Already Paris was being invested for the siege she was to undergo. The troops, among whom Ernest Vilalta had his place, were following rapidly in his wake towards the doomed city; but they were opposed continually by the scattered remnants of the French army, and many a fierce combat took place, which strewed the ground with the lifeless forms of brave men sacrificed in vain.

Such an encounter was expected on the morrow by Ernest's regiment and others associated with it. The Prussian General in command knew that the enemy awaiting him a few leagues off had mustered in greater force than any they had yet encountered, and it was only the darkness of a moonless night which had gained a few hours' respite for the contending foes.

He had ordered the troops to forage for what provisions they could get that they might be ready for the fierce work that would begin with the morning light, and most of the officers and men alike were busy over the spoils of farms and country houses which they had pillaged as they traversed the fertile vales of France.

Ernest had not as yet joined any of them. He had forgotten the hunger which a short time before had seemed unbearable, because the balloon post had just brought a welcome batch of letters, sent out almost as the last possible despatch from Paris, and there was one for him, written on behalf of the whole family by his brother Ferdinand. Crouching down by the camp-fire, which his companions had deserted to go to the provision tent for their supper, Ernest devoured every line of the closely-written sheets by the flame-light beside him, while Leo lay across his feet and watched him intently with his loving eyes.

The correspondence between Ernest and his family had been carried on without much difficulty up to the moment when the investment of Paris had taken place; but he knew well that he was reading the last communication he could possibly receive from any within those iron-girded walls. He had heard that, almost immediately after his departure from England, his father had summoned his wife and children to rejoin him at his post in Paris, and they had remained there together ever since that time. Ferdinand wrote that a general flight of all who could afford to escape had taken place so soon as it was known that the siege was really going to commence.

Señor Vilalta, as the representative of his country, felt bound to

remain, whatever hardships he might have to undergo; but he insisted that at least his wife and daughter must be sent away to a place of safety, while a terrible discovery which had just been made with regard to Ferdinand rendered it absolutely necessary that he too should depart as quickly as possible. "Conceive my feelings, Ernest," the letter went on to say, "when I received this morning the imperative order to take up arms in defence of Paris, and to go forthwith on the ramparts to fight the Prussians under the French General's command. Every young man, of whatever nationality, who is found within these walls to-morrow is to be enrolled for the defence of the city. My sympathies are much with the unfortunate French, and I would have fought for them willingly were it not that I should be brought face to face in mortal combat with my own twin brother—you on the Prussian side, I among the French. My mother's horror at the very idea is so overwhelming that she has been straining every nerve to get ready to leave Paris this very night—in fact, we must go at once if we are to go at all; the railways are nearly all blocked, and it will be no easy matter to get down to the coast, whether at Calais or Boulogne. We go to England; to the Manor House, of course; only my father remains in our house, which, being a legation, with the Spanish flag hoisted over it, cannot be sacked for food or money."

Ernest was still scanning every word of this letter, lost to the present in the thought of his mother and his home, when a soldier passing near suddenly perceived him and stopped. He drew himself up to the prescribed attitude and saluted.

"Herr Hauptman," he said—for Ernest had now attained the rank of captain. The young man looked up and saw that it was a private of his own regiment, to whom he had shown some kindness. "Excuse the liberty, but I wish just to tell you that if you do not go at once to get your share of the food going in the provision tent, you will be left to starve for to-night and to-morrow. The officers from all the different regiments are devouring everything they can lay hands upon. There will be nothing at all left in another half hour."

"You are right, my good fellow," said Ernest, rising at once. "It will not do for me to go into action to-morrow as a starving man. Thanks for the warning." And, folding up his letter, he thrust it into his breast and made his way at once to the tent where his fellow-officers were engaged on the first regular meal they had had that day.

It was crammed with hungry men, many of whom were unknown to him, as they did not all belong to his own regiment. There was not a single empty seat, and every available cup or dish was being vigorously used to appropriate portions of the provisions which occupied the centre of the table. Ernest, whose keen appetite was now making itself felt in full force, stood in the entrance to the tent, looking on wistfully at the meal which there seemed no chance of his being able to share. A young German officer, however, who was

seated near the door, happened to look up and see him thus condemned by his tardy arrival to witness the rapid disappearance of the food he so much required; and although he had had no previous acquaintance with Ernest Vilalta, he good-humouredly came to his assistance, and he beckoned him quickly to his side. Then he made room for him on the barrel turned upside down, which formed his seat, and arranged that Ernest should share both his plate and his cup; so that, being provided with his own pocket-knife, he was able in the end to make a very good supper. When it was over he warmly thanked his unknown protector for the kindness he had done him, and eagerly scanned his handsome, pleasant countenance in order that he might recognise him in the future. At that moment the drum beat for all to retire to their quarters and get what rest they could before the dawn called them into action.

Into the details of the terrible fight which took place next day we shall not enter. Our history has to do solely with the fortunes of the Vilalta family, and not with the details of that unforgotten struggle between two great military powers which well-nigh convulsed the whole of Europe while it lasted.

Ernest Vilalta's horse had been shot under him towards the close of the contest, but he himself had escaped uninjured. The Prussian loss had been slight compared with that of the French, and he was standing leaning somewhat mournfully on his sword as he looked down on the sad sights spread everywhere around, when suddenly he saw a Prussian officer staggering along, making a last supreme effort to reach a place of shelter. He stumbled and nearly fell at every step, evidently weakened to the utmost degree by loss of blood, and just as he reached Ernest, who had started forward to assist him, he sank down at his feet in a dead faint.

Ernest flung down his sword and went on his knees beside the prostrate man, lifting his head on his arm. And, as he did so, he instantly recognised in the pallid suffering face the countenance of the young officer who had befriended him on the previous night at the crowded supper-table, and let him share his seat and drink with him from the cup which had served them both.

Here for a moment we must pause to say that this is no fictitious incident, but the true and actual experience of the real individual whom we have described under the name of Ernest Vilalta. The writer heard him relate with what strong emotion he discovered in the officer who thus fell at his feet the unknown benefactor whom he had met for the first time in the provision tent.

How thankful he felt to be able to make him now some return for his kindness! He called vehemently to a soldier who was passing near, bearing water to the wounded, and with some of it laved the face and hands of the fainting man, till a low sigh, passing from his lips, showed that he still lived. Then, with the help of the soldier, Ernest lifted him from the ground, and between them they succeeded

in carrying him to the hospital tent, though it stood at a considerable distance from the battle-field. They found it already crowded with the wounded, who were rapidly being brought in; but Ernest succeeded in obtaining a vacant mattress for his friend, where he laid him down. After what seemed a long time to his impatience, one of the army surgeons attending to the stricken men made his way to Ernest's charge, and proceeded to examine his condition.

"The wound is not fatal," he said in answer to Vilalta's eager questions. "I can bind up the shoulder so that it will soon heal; but he is in temporary peril from loss of blood. His life depends on his having nourishment and stimulants every hour. He seems to be a friend of yours, Herr Hauptman. Can you take care of him through the night? We have not soldier-nurses enough for even half the wounded."

"I will stay with him gladly!" exclaimed Ernest. "I will just go and report myself to my superior officer whilst you are bandaging his wounds, and I shall be back in five minutes."

When he returned, after a short interval, having got ready permission from his colonel to act the part of nurse for the present, he found that the wounded officer had already revived sufficiently to open his eyes and look round with a confused, uncertain gaze. He was too weak to speak, however; and Ernest, having received full directions from the surgeon, sat down on the ground by his side—there being no available seats—and began the process of feeding the powerful-looking man as if he were an infant, with such small spoonfuls of soup and stimulants as he was able to take, until the slumber of exhaustion at last overtook him.

The darkness of night soon settled down upon the camp and on the sleepers lying under the stars upon the fatal field, to awaken no more till the trump of the archangel should call them from their long repose.

Ernest's patient slept during the greater part of the night, though he was slightly feverish from his wound; and when daylight at last made its way fully into the tent, he was sufficiently revived to speak to his faithful companion. He opened his eyes and looked up at Ernest; then a faint smile passed over his pale lips as he evidently recognised him.

"Ah, it is you," he said—"the hungry captain! I hope you are not hurt. I can feel that I am, and I see I am in hospital; but you——" He stopped, plainly not able for many words in his weakness.

"I am simply your nurse," said Ernest, smiling. "I have not been wounded—only my poor bay charger that carried me so well lies prone on the field. But you have fared worse than I did, though I am thankful to say you are no longer in danger; the doctor has just said you are going on favourably."

"I do not feel as if I should ever be fit for anything again," said the officer ruefully; "it is an effort even to speak."

"Doubtless you will have to be a few weeks in hospital before you can return to duty, but I am assured there is no fear of your ultimate recovery."

"And you have been with me all night after fighting all day? How come you to be my nurse, Herr Hauptman?" said the sick man faintly.

"Because some instinct led you to fall in a dead faint at the feet of the very person who, above all others, was bound to do what he could for you. Last night you let me share your meal when, but for your kindness, I should have had to go into action in a very unfit condition. I was delighted to have an opportunity of showing my gratitude by taking care of you now."

"You have indeed most generously repaid a very small service," said the officer languidly; and then his head sank back, and he closed his eyes in exhaustion.

Ernest Vilalta still remained with him till the colonel came to the tent to make arrangements for the removal of the wounded to the regular hospital of a town which was only a few leagues off. When the list of names was read out, Ernest found that his patient was Lieutenant Wilhelm Steinsdorf, of the Hussars; and, to his infinite satisfaction, he found himself appointed by the colonel to be the officer in command of the ambulance waggons, so that he was to accompany the wounded men and remain with them for a few days in order to report on their condition at headquarters.

As a natural consequence of the care and attention Ernest had bestowed on his patient, he began to feel a vivid interest in him. He went, therefore, with the most cheerful alacrity to get another horse in place of the faithful animal he had lost that he might ride at the head of the waggons full of wounded men and lead them safely to their destination.

It was late in the evening when they arrived at the town hospital, and the sick men were at once put to bed in the wards—only too sadly crowded by their numbers. Once this was done, the soldier-nurses were allowed to depart, for there were Sisters of Charity and other women to attend to the patients, though unhappily not so many as were required by the critical cases so suddenly placed under their care. Steinsdorf had not apparently suffered by the journey, but he was too much exhausted to do more than murmur a faint "*Schlafen sie wohl*" when Ernest left him for the night and went very thankfully to take the rest he so much needed himself.

Next morning the young Captain Vilalta returned to the hospital at an early hour; and as soon as he had gone over the roll-call and ascertained how many of the poor soldiers had succumbed to their injuries, he went eagerly to Steinsdorf's bedside, anxious to know how he had passed the long hours of the night. He found him somewhat better and stronger, but restless and low-spirited. He complained to Ernest that the nurses were much too few for the requirements of the

sick, and that he had been a good deal neglected, besides being painfully affected by the deaths which had taken place in the ward.

"And here I must lie for at least three weeks, the doctor tells me," he said gloomily. "You will not be able to stay with me, my good friend, for you will certainly be recalled to duty in a very few days."

"No doubt," replied Ernest; "but you must tell me if there is anything I can do in the meantime to help you."

"You can help me very much if you will carry out a plan I have thought of in the night. I want so much to get my sister Lotta here to take care of me and keep me company. I hope it is not selfish to wish to bring her into such a place, for she went through a nurse's training of her own free will that she might be of use if ever there should be war in the Fatherland. She would long to be with me if she knew I was wounded, but I am too weak to write or make any arrangements for her coming; you must do it, if it is done at all."

"That I will most readily!" exclaimed Ernest. "Where is your sister? Can I write to her?"

"She is at Augsburg, where my father and mother live; it is our home."

"That is good. Then I can send her a telegram; the wires have not been cut from here."

"Why, that might bring her to me this evening!" exclaimed Steinsdorf. "Send her a short message—'Wilhelm is wounded, lying in hospital. Come to him'—and she will be here as quickly as the train can bring her."

Ernest was delighted to see how his friend had brightened under the prospect of having his only sister with him. He hurried off to the telegraph office and succeeded at that early hour in getting his message despatched at once. Late that evening he made his way once more to Steinsdorf's bedside, hoping to be able to make him comfortable for the night, and there, to his great satisfaction, he found a dainty little maiden, wearing a nurse's uniform, but unmistakably a lady, whom Steinsdorf with the greatest pride and satisfaction introduced as his sister Lottchen. She had lovely brown eyes, which she raised gratefully to Ernest's own as she thanked him for his kindness to her brother, and the young man thought he had never looked upon a more charming face. Lotta possessed the delicate tints of a wild rose, and, with all her freshness and youthfulness, had an expression that told of serious thought and high-minded earnestness. It seemed to Ernest, indeed, after he had passed half an hour in her company, that she combined the meditative gravity of Alba Wyndham's disposition with the light-hearted vivacity of his young sister Elvira, and he left Steinsdorf's side that night convinced that, despite his wound, he was the most fortunate person in the world to possess such a companion.

III.

It may be imagined with what feelings of anxiety and distress Christine Vilalta left Paris with her son and daughter. She was obliged to leave her husband in their house, protected as it was by the Spanish flag; but she knew that if the siege were prolonged till provisions failed, he would have to share the dire hardships of the people. She was standing by his side making some last arrangements just before starting, when Elvira came flying into the room with tears in her bright eyes.

"Mother," she exclaimed, "the servants tell me that all my poor pretty canary birds will be eaten up during the siege! They say nothing that has life will escape; yet you say that I am not to take them away with me!"

"We cannot possibly take a dozen singing birds with us, dear child," said Christine. "We shall have difficulty enough in getting through to the coast ourselves, and can only travel with such baggage as we can carry in our hands."

"Console yourself, Elvira," said her father good-humouredly; "I will try to protect your birds. They would not make much of a mouthful any one of them, or even if they were all put together; and I think everything in this house will be safe under my flag."

We may here mention a fact which was greatly commented upon after the siege was over in Paris, that when the Vilaltas returned to their house in that city, they found their little canary birds alive and well, singing away as merrily as if the most appalling scenes had not been taking place under the window where they hung. They were said to have been the only edible creatures that still retained their life in the whole place.

How strange it seemed to them to pass from all the distracting tumult of that war-stricken country, to the quiet, peaceful home where the placid old man—his battles long since ended—sat quite undisturbed by his fireside, tended by the loving care of his gentle Alba! It was like being in another world; and the light-hearted Elvira, who as yet had known no greater anxiety than that which had been aroused by the possible fate of her canaries, was very soon as gay and happy as ever. But she was the only real element of gladness in the house, for her mother and Ferdinand had both in different ways heavy causes of disquietude, and there was a deep shade of sadness in Alba's limpid blue eyes, though with her usual self-forgetting reserve she said nothing as to her own feelings at any time.

Christine Vilalta was a brave woman; she had gone through many severe trials since her marriage; she had had a numerous family, and her children had been taken from her one by one, till only the three remained in whom her strong affections were now centred; yet never perhaps had she known such a cruel weight of intolerable suspense as that which she strove to bear patiently during the weeks

that rolled over her head in the quiet Manor House. For a terrible silence had fallen upon her at last as regarded the fate of her soldier son. Ernest had from the beginning of the war been most assiduous in writing to his mother by every possible opportunity which presented itself, and for some time after she took refuge at the Manor House his letters still reached her at rare intervals. At length they ceased altogether, and now for many weeks she had been a prey to the most cruel uncertainty. Not a syllable which could give her tidings of him had reached her in any shape or way.

The winter commenced very early in that terrible year, and such rumours of the work of the Prussian army as did come to her ears told of snow lying thick and deep on the battle-fields, of sentinels frozen to death at their posts, of deadly combats fought amidst blinding storms, of havoc and destruction going on even among the Prussian forces, though they were still entirely victorious. Many and many a time during this agonising period Christine gave up her Ernest as lost to her for ever in this world, and her fine face grew haggard and wan with an unappeasable yearning and regret which was never stilled in her aching breast for a moment. One only gleam of comfort she had in the fact that Ferdinand refused absolutely to believe that any fatal catastrophe had befallen his brother. He declared that he had an instinctive conviction Ernest was yet alive, which was to himself as undeniable a proof of his safety as if he had seen him with his own eyes. And Christine knew that a mysterious sympathy does often exist between twins which renders them in some indefinable way cognisant of any calamity which befalls each other.

Ferdinand had none the less his full measure of suffering during the long weeks of suspense which so sorely tried his mother. He had a weight at his heart that was almost intolerable to his strong passionate nature, because he could take no action to remove it, and had only to bear it in resolute silence. He was living in closest intercourse with Alba Wyndham. Every hour that he passed in her presence seemed to show him more and more clearly the rare beauty of her character, the almost angelic sweetness of her disposition; the deep love he had borne her from the first grew in its intensity within him till it seemed to absorb his whole being; yet he dared not make the faintest attempt to win her. The dread that Ernest loved Alba Wyndham no less fondly than he did himself had only deepened with the strengthening of his own attachment; and it seemed to him a treachery of which his noble nature was quite incapable, that he should basely snatch at this unequalled prize while his brother, far away amid his stern duties on the battle-field, was precluded from any possibility of even trying to gain it. Meantime it was a great addition to his trial that he found himself quite unable to conjecture what Alba's feelings really were. She was singularly reserved respecting everything that concerned herself, simply because her thoughts and sympathies were all for others; and in her pure unselfishness she seemed to care

nothing for her own happiness if only she could minister to that of the friends around her.

So the days in the gathering winter gloom passed slowly over the quiet English home.

One afternoon General Wyndham was seated as usual in his great chair near the fire, with Alba in her favourite position on a stool at his feet. Christine, at a table, was writing to her husband on a tiny scrap of paper such as could be placed under a carrier pigeon's wing; and Ferdinand, apparently engaged with a book in his hand, was doing his best to catch a glimpse of the "forget-me-not blue eyes" on which Ernest had been wont to gaze so admiringly.

Suddenly the old man raised himself out of his chair and stood upright on his feet. He grasped his gold-headed walking-stick, without which he was now too feeble to move, in one hand, while he placed the other on Alba's shoulder as she rose to assist him. "Come with me, dear child," he said, and she went at once, supporting him gently and thinking that he might wish to lie down, as he often did during the day.

To her surprise, however, instead of going into his own room he made his way to the hall, where the antlers of the deer he had shot in his youth were still fixed to the wall. He looked round with a wistful gaze, then passed on to the library and dining-room, and finally into every part of the house which had ever been occupied by himself or the young wife he had lost nearly half a century before. She had died when Christine, their only child, was born, and he had spent many years after in active service; but she seemed to be present with him that day, as he went into her long disused boudoir and touched with tender hand the little ornaments that had belonged to her.

The Manor House had been the home of his forefathers, and he had himself been born there. Alba saw him fix a strange earnest gaze on all the familiar objects as he led her on from room to room, preserving, however, a complete silence. When he seemed to consider that his survey was concluded, he went quietly back to his place by the fireside and sat down as before without a word. The incident filled Alba with an undefinable sense of uneasiness.

The General had for some time previously been very wakeful and restless at night; his memory had failed him a good deal, and although it was not very noticeable through the day, it led him during the long dark hours to go back in imagination to the events of his childhood and youth, till it seemed to him that many of his early friends, whose feet were treading no more on any mortal shore, were sitting by his side and companying with him as of old. Since he had had these harmless delusions Alba had remained with him at night, taking what rest she could on a low couch near him, while his servant occupied the dressing-room beyond. On the evening after his strange progress through the house she did not attempt to lie down, but sat quietly by his bedside, even after he had fallen into what seemed to be a very tranquil slumber.

Suddenly, about midnight, he started awake and sat upright in his bed, with his eyes wide open, gazing fixedly in front of him. A light was burning near, which shone full on his face; and Alba was amazed to see with what a strange look of vigour and youthfulness it seemed to be imprinted. He stretched out his right hand with a dignified gesture, and then in a loud, clear voice gave the word of command to his regiment, whom it was evident he believed were standing in their ranks before him. Quick and sharp his different orders rang out for the performance of various military manœuvres. He seemed to scan the manner in which they were carried on, glancing keenly from side to side, and for some minutes this pathetic drama of the aged man's imaginary revival of the scenes and duties of his youth went on with extraordinary vividness and power.

Alba watched him, breathless with surprise and alarm; but at last she saw a look of bewilderment pass over his animated face; he shaded his eyes for a moment with his hand, and then said:

"It grows dark—quite dark; we cannot continue the parade. If I had known that night was to fall so soon I would not have called the men out; they must retire to their quarters." He gave the order to that effect, but with a less steady voice; then after a moment he added: "Have the men all dispersed?—are they safely housed?—is the ground clear?"

"Yes," said Alba, anxious to allay his excitement by falling in with his fancy for the moment. "All are gone—they are safe in their barracks."

"Then my work is done," the good General said in feeble faltering tones. "I will go home."

He sank back gently on his pillows. His eyes, so bright and keen a few moments before, closed as in quiet sleep; his fine features settled into an expression of perfect peace. He lay there motionless, his long white hair falling back from his serene face, an image of majestic repose; and the watcher by his side knew that it was even as he had said. The noble old soldier had gone home.

That same night, about the midnight hour, Ernest Vilalta lay stretched on the snow that covered an extensive plain, where a sanguinary battle had been fought that day. The snow had partly come down during the fight, but there had been more after the victorious Prussian troops had retired, leaving hundreds of the fallen, both friends and foes, upon the field, where nothing could be done for those who might be yet alive during the hours of darkness.

Ernest lay somewhat apart from the others. He had been struck down by a shot which had completely shattered his right ankle and foot, while he already bore less serious wounds on his head and arm. Another bullet had found its way to him after he was down, but that had been rendered harmless by a singular circumstance, for it was found afterwards embedded in the small black Testament which Alba

Wyndham had given him, and which he carried next his heart under his uniform.

He had lain there some hours already, and the snow which had fallen since had been of service to him in checking the hemorrhage from his terribly injured foot, while the intense cold had to some extent benumbed his sense of pain. But Ernest's forces, mental and bodily, were at a very low ebb. Weak and exhausted as he was, his power of thought was untouched, and almost in spite of himself he could not help revolving in his mind again and again his chances for the future. Youth does not easily believe that death can be very near, and he thought it quite possible that he might live till morning if the exposure to the bitter frost did not prove too much even for his strong vitality; then, when the burying party were sent to scour the field and dispose one way or another of the stricken soldiers, if they found him still breathing they might try to bear him away to a hospital, only perhaps to see him expire under the pain and fatigue of the transit. A groan broke from his lips, for he knew that if he did survive it must be as a maimed cripple. What remained of his foot would have to be amputated—he must leave the army. Never in the whole course of his life had Ernest Vilalta known such depths of depression as those which weighed him down in that dark hour.

And then it was that a most strange consolation seemed to be vouchsafed to him. He could never afterwards tell whether it was a dream or a vision that came to him on his couch of snow, but this was what befell him.

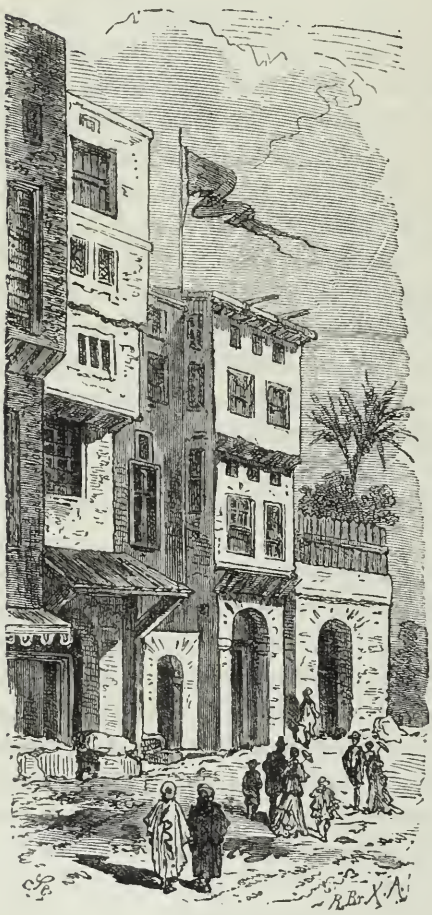
Suddenly he saw his aged grandfather standing by his side, with his well-known features perfectly clear and distinct in the light of a faint halo, which seemed to surround his form. He looked down at Ernest with the kind, loving eyes the young man knew so well, and said in the firm accents of the voice that had rung in his ears many and many a time since his childish days: "Fear not, my son, be a good soldier of Christ, and all will be well." Still for a moment he stood there, while Ernest, unable to speak—he knew not why—gazed at him until, waving his hand as if in farewell, he repeated in tones that had a far-off sound, "Be a good soldier of Christ," and instantly the place where he had stood was vacant; there was no one there.

The spell was broken. Ernest found voice to call out feebly, "Grandfather, my dear Grandfather!" but there was no answer. He looked out eagerly over the desolate plain, but nowhere could he see that venerable beloved form. Too weak to move, he fell back and lay still. But he was no longer as he had been before; a glow of hope seemed to have suddenly cheered his spirit; his faith and trust revived, he felt content to leave himself in the hands of the Captain of his salvation; and thereafter he remembered nothing more, for he fell into a sort of slumbrous stupor, which steeped his senses in complete oblivion.

(*To be concluded.*)

IN THE LOTUS-LAND.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Letters from Majorca," "The Bretons at Home," etc., etc.



House in Rosetta.

WE have seen that the decline of Egypt was very gradual. Through long centuries, though her dynasties might change, she retained all her distinguishing features, all her peculiar individuality. One dynasty followed another, but the ambition of each was to reign, not to bring in a new order of things. If there were reforms, they were only progressive, carried out on long-existing lines. The different systems of writing that arose were merely the result of experience based on past learning—improvements following upon old laws and customs, long existing traditions.

The religion of the Egyptians also remained fundamentally the same from age to age. Their belief never varied; rites and ceremonies and sacrifices did not change. Divisions and contentions were unknown. If in one city Apis was worshipped, and in another Isis, no rivalry or angry feeling, no controversy arose in consequence. Occasionally, as the centuries rolled on, they added new gods to their list of deities; but they were only extensions, emanations, as it were, from the great Source of all, assistant deities to those they had already set up and worshipped. No violent transitions shocked their prejudices. They were a serious people, those early Egyptians, not frivolous, uncertain, or change-loving.

So with her art and architecture. In this, as in everything else, they were conservative. The outlines of their sculpture, the set pose of their figures, the form and fashion of their temples, these

never altered. Where their first inspiration came from can never be known. It may have existed for ages before our earliest records ; for if a race flourished for centuries before Menes, it would seem impossible to place a limit to the time when the human race did not exist.

Their creations were built upon grand and majestic lines. Breadth, height, colossal proportions, these only appealed to them, and to represent these was their ambition. Of smallness and narrowness, of triviality of detail and meanness of outline, they knew nothing. Wide as their desert plains, free as their own free winds, deep, silent and endless as the flow of their great river, such was the Egyptian temperament. They were simply a reflection of their own vast territory, many portions of which, in the earlier times, were inaccessible to man. And in all times and with all nations it will be found that the aspect of a country has had great influence upon the character of the people ; proving that, consciously or unconsciously, Nature is one of the great moving powers, one of the great educators of the world. If we visit Egypt and gaze upon the Pyramids, the wonderful ruins that are scattered up and down the banks of the Nile ; the gigantic monoliths that in countless numbers were placed stone upon stone, with a skill of which all trace is lost, and even imagination cannot realise, we shall stand in silent and amazed contemplation before these multiplied evidences of an almost superhuman strength and intellect. The very Sphinx which seems to be looking out upon the great desert upon the one hand, the distant and invisible sea upon the other, seems the absolute emblem of repose, as though resting in its sense of utmost power, suggestive of the very spirit and essence of guardianship and protection. The minds that conceived it must have been equally great and stupendous.

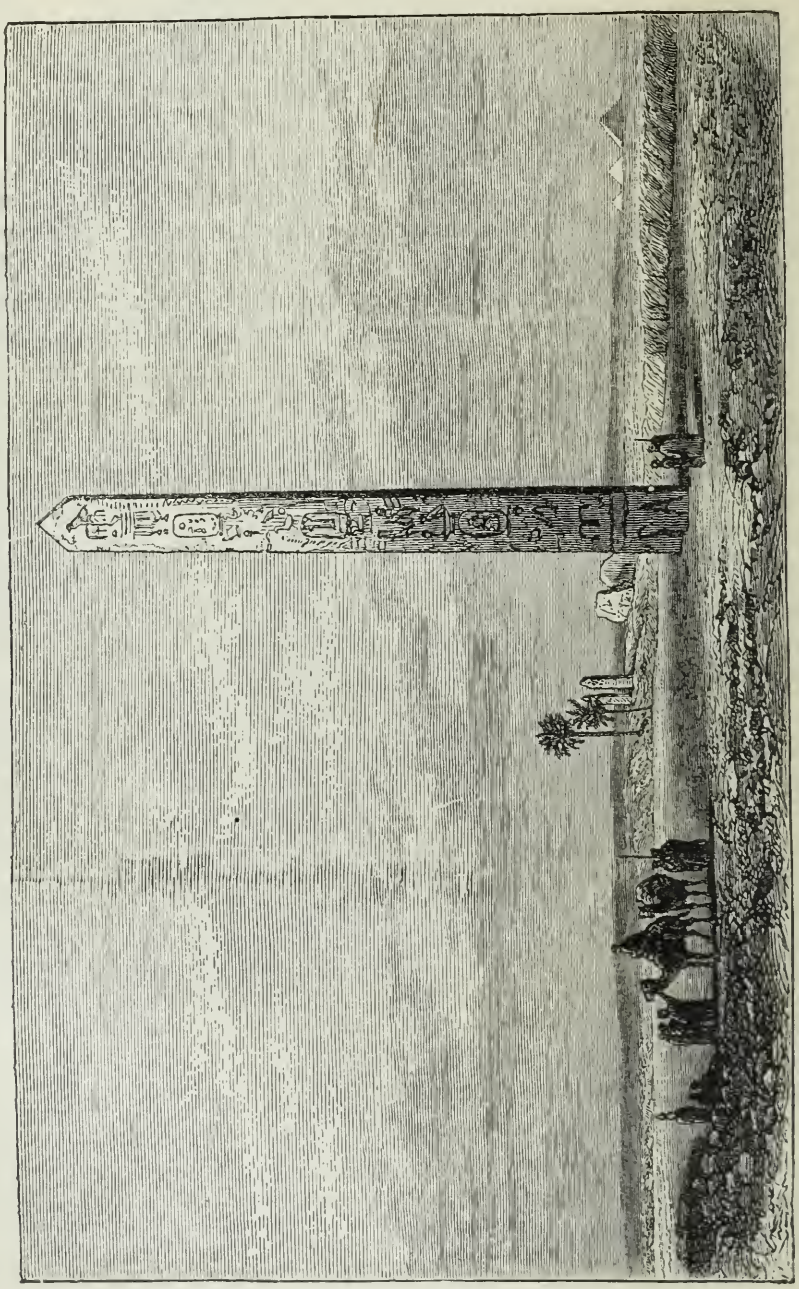
And so Egypt went on, to our knowledge, for more than four thousand years, fluctuating in prosperity, as all nations must ever fluctuate, but remaining firm and true to her traditions—a religious people whose lives were guided and controlled by a strong faith, and who evidently had great and earnest conceptions of love and charity and duty towards their neighbour. Their records and remains prove this beyond all doubt and dispute.

But nothing lasts for ever. Even great countries have their setting as certainly as their rising. For nations as well as for men and women there is an old age and decadence. It came for Egypt. Other nations sprang up and looked upon her with envious eyes. In those days the desire for conquest had no limits, and people went to war for no other reason.

Egypt had been going through gradual changes when the Persians came down upon her five centuries before the Christian era, and established their rule in the once favoured Lotus-Land.

She was still to prosper for a time ; but it was not as the Egypt of old, free and untrammelled, drawing her prosperity from the riches of all nations. She had now to submit to the yoke of bondage,

and it pressed heavily upon her. Alexander was hailed as a deliverer, and under the early Ptolemies we have seen that she was happy and prosperous; nevertheless she was making steady, though almost unseen, progress towards her decline.



Obelisk of Usertesen at Heliopolis.

Under the Romans she fell away in art, in literature, in individuality, in all those features which contribute to the making and keeping of a great nation. Constantine, by upholding Christianity, and Theodosius by making it law, seem to strike the last blow at

Pagan Egypt. All her traditions died with her. Even her literature was destroyed, though by indirect agencies; the secret of her writing was lost, as it seemed, for ever; her hieroglyphics became mere outlines without sense or meaning; her gods were thrown down; her symbols were scattered. Nothing remained to prove what had been excepting a land of ruined monuments, and a people that had become a mixture of races, in which the old pure Egyptian element could scarcely be traced. Under the Byzantine domination the Court was held at Constantinople, and little good was accomplished, and no upward progress was possible. The fatalism of the indolent Turks almost seemed to fall upon the Egyptians, and they made little effort to save and to elevate that which was destined for the stranger. Religious controversies arose, disputings of doctrines, unsettling the faith of many. The love of change is inherent in human nature, which, in its inconstancy, too often argues that a change for the worse is better than no change at all.

The Christian doctrines which passed into law under Theodosius were questioned, doubted, distorted, and finally changed in their most essential elements.

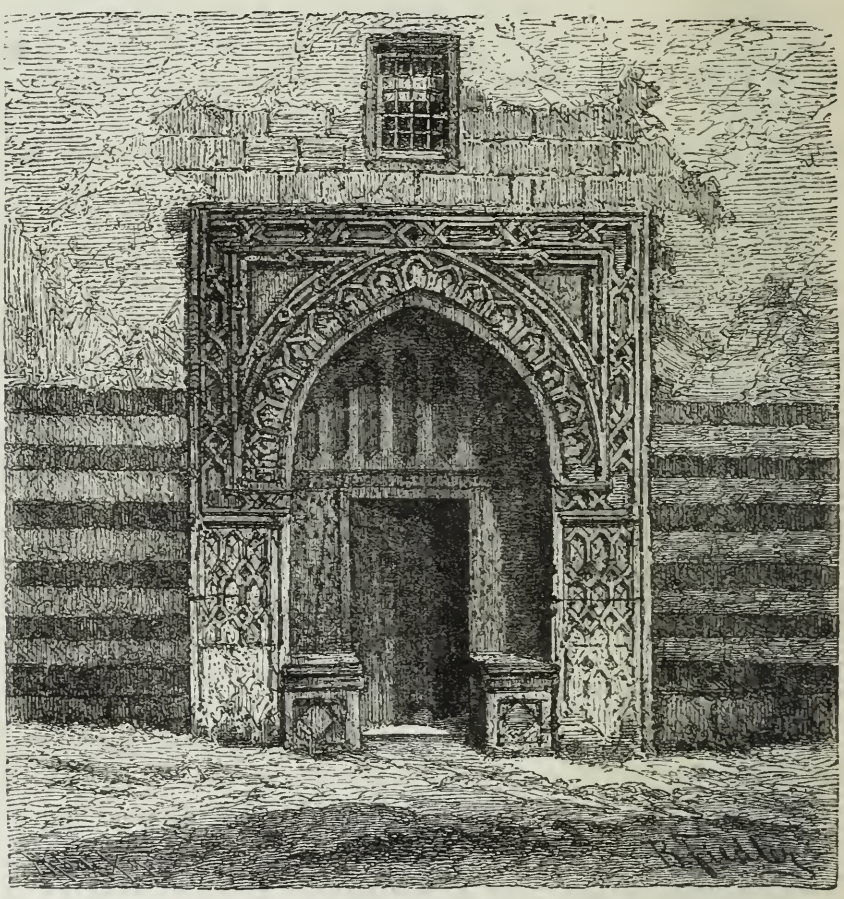
Two parties arose, and many sects; the Theodosian Christians were in the minority, and became a distinct and separate people, who were called Copts; but even into their belief a few heresies sprang up. The new administration under Justinian was signalised by this movement, as well as by the persecutions of the Christians in Alexandria. Under Theodosius they had triumphed; paganism had been destroyed; Theophilus, the Patriarch of Alexandria, had helped with his own hands to hurl the heathen temples and monuments to the ground. In a less righteous cause his zeal would have amounted to fanaticism or something worse. The statue of Serapis, which had been brought from Sinope by Augustus, and was treated by all Egypt with the reverence due to a deity, was destroyed and burnt in the falling ruins of the Serapeum amidst the triumphant shouts of the Christians.

But Alexandria was doomed; her prosperity decreased, her riches fell away. Theophilus died, and a new, unorthodox patriarch, Cyril, succeeded him. His fanaticism was equal to that of Theophilus, and less well directed. His hatred of the Jews amounted to persecution, and he expelled them from the city. The curse that had fallen upon them was already at work; they should be a scattered nation, without country or abiding city of their own, until in the far-off ages the time of their restoration should come, and the "chosen people" should once more become reconciled to their Creator.

Lawlessness arose in Alexandria, and in many other parts of Egypt. People were put to death for no other reason than that they were true to their faith, and that an infuriated mob held rule. One of the saddest and most notorious victims was Hypatia, the daughter of Theon, the mathematician, a woman whose beauty was unrivalled, and

whose intellect was only inferior to that of her father. Her murder in the year 415 for a moment seemed to strike consternation into the hearts of the leaders, but it remained unavenged, and the reign of lawlessness was not stayed.

It was just a thousand years after this that Alexandria sank into absolute decay, and became as a dead city. The discovery of America, and of the Cape route to India, completed the downfall. The Mamelukes, by their infamous reign, only added to the wreck and ruin of all. The inhabitants, once numbering half a million, fell to below



Door of an Arabian House.

five thousand. The City of Palaces had disappeared as completely as the baseless fabric of a vision. The surrounding country, once fertile and flourishing, became a desert waste. "How are the mighty fallen!" might have been said of Alexandria, as David exclaimed it at the death of Jonathan and Saul.

The Byzantine rule began in Egypt about the year 400 of the Christian era, and in the year 638 it was succeeded by the Arabian conquest and the establishment of Mohammedanism.

From what we have said it is evident that Egypt was ripe for a new

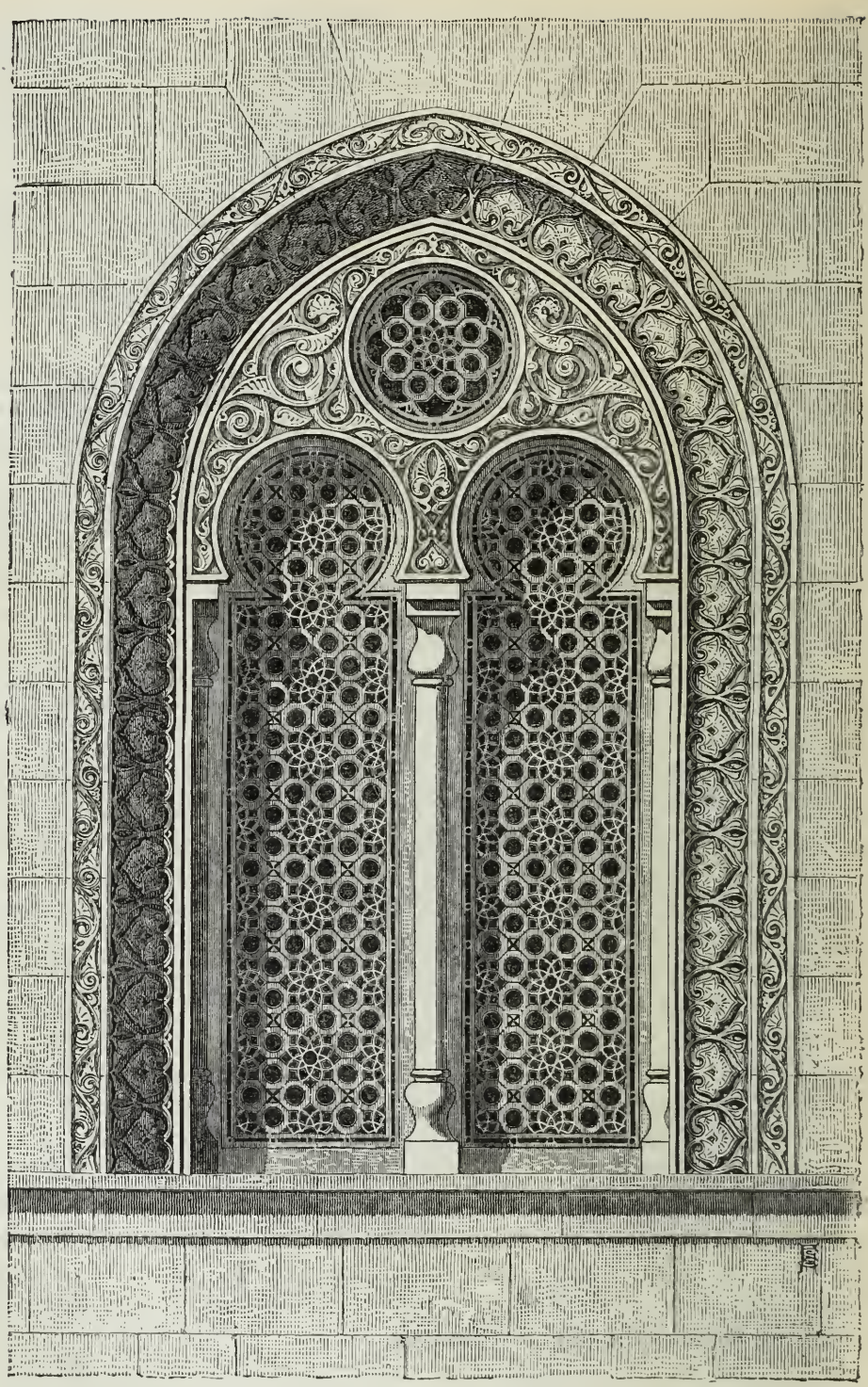
order of things, even a new religion. Everything in connection with Ancient Egypt had departed and disappeared. Her greatness and grandeur, her religion, her learning, her hieroglyphics, her mysticism, all her old landmarks, the early type of the people, with their gigantic energy, their breadth and depth of intellect, their earnestness of purpose, and their power of accomplishing almost the impossible: all was at an end. The days when 100,000 men could be employed in a thirty years' labour without let or hindrance or doubt of success had passed away for ever. It may even be said that when the Arabs conquered Egypt the people were glad of the change, and received it with enthusiasm.

In truth, anything was better than the Byzantine dominion. The Arabs, therefore, found Egypt an easy conquest and a willing prey. They were ready to submit to the new yoke. All the changes that the Arabs were desirous of introducing found favour in their eyes.

The Arabians were not slow in availing themselves of this willingness on the part of the Egyptians. The very first thing they did was to introduce Mohammedanism into the country, and henceforth it became her established religion. What Egypt would have been had she remained purely Christian, true to the faith legalised by Theodosius, will never be known. As men individually by their lives too often lose blessings and privileges that would otherwise have been theirs, so is it in the history of nations. It is possible that Egypt by her own acts diverted into other channels a rich stream of favour and prosperity by which her lasting happiness and glory would have been assured. Be this as it may, the Arabs came and saw and conquered; set up a new religion and a new dominion; their influence was felt throughout the land, and to-day its traces remain to charm the traveller when almost everything else in connection with Egypt has passed away.

Old Cairo became their new city and capital. With Alexandria they would have nothing to do; it was too full of dissensions; its people were too disaffected and unruly, too indolent and abandoned. Cairo was also better suited for their purpose; its situation was more central; they could more easily communicate with the interior of the country. It was here that Cambyses in the year 525 B.C.—an interval of more than a thousand years—had founded New Babylon, and the Romans had made it the headquarters of one of the three legions they kept in Egypt during their occupancy of the land. For they treated Egypt as a dependence, never holding any court there or bestowing upon it the slightest honour.

Old Cairo became the seat of government of the Arabs, and from this fact it remains one of the most interesting cities of the world, one of the most typical from an Oriental point of view. Most especially they introduced a new order of architecture, not so much in their houses as in their temples. Before the time of Mohammed they do not seem to have possessed a very distinctive architecture of their



Window in the Mausoleum of Kala'oon.

own; but religion has always influenced art, and it remained for the doctrines of the false prophet to establish a new school of architecture upon a distinct and decided basis. They began by con-

verting the Byzantine churches that they found in Cairo into mosques: and to this day many of these mosques are a mixture of the Byzantine and Arabian elements. At first they did not even possess their own architects, but all their work was done by the architects of Greece.

Their own school, when it arose, was strongly influenced by the Byzantine and the Persian. From the latter they received their love of gorgeousness and grandeur, of pomp and magnificence, for which, no less than the Persians whom they as quickly followed, they became distinguished. But gorgeousness and ceremonial, everything that appeals to the imagination and the senses, must for ever be associated with the East, that true "land of the sun."

The earliest mosques were built with materials brought from ancient ruins of the Nile, and here the Arabs did indeed bad service to the Lotus-Land. The day will come when their ruins, also, will be treated in like manner. Many of the columns in these mosques had previously belonged to Greek or Roman monuments. The Egyptian columns, many of which were immense monoliths, they discarded as too heavy and plain for their lighter buildings. Their decorations consisted of inscriptions and arabesques and geometrical patterns ingeniously combined with leaves and flowers, rich and striking in effect. Their colours were of the richest and most beautiful description; it is impossible to rival the best examples that have come down to us. They also largely employed the mosaics and enamelled glass which entered so much into the Byzantine decoration. The idea of their pointed arches and domes they took from the region of the Euphrates; but the domes of Arabian architecture were more beautiful and graceful than any other. These were reserved rather for their tombs than their temples, and it is this which gives to the Tombs of the Caliphs at Cairo so refined and distinctive a character. All the mosques in Cairo, with the exception of two, have flat roofs. Many of the ancient mosques had their tombs beside them, such as the small and beautiful mosque of Kait-Bey and the mosques of Hassan and Barkouk.

In taking possession of Egypt, the Arabs found nothing that appealed to their own temperament. Two people more opposed to each other could not exist. And although the Egyptians had passed through changes and vicissitudes, and the tongues of many nations had echoed in her thoroughfares, it was only when the Arabs established their rule that the face of the country became changed beyond recognition.

Depth and mystery, mysticism and symbolism, these had been the keynotes of the Egyptian religion. Her temples were held sacred from the people; none but the priests were allowed to enter; gloom, sometimes absolute darkness, characterised them. Their walls were covered with hieroglyphics, with representations of animals and the human figure.

All this was opposed to the followers of the new religion of Mohammed. Their temples held nothing mysterious or hidden; the greater part of the building was open to the sky; the doors were ever open to any of the faithful who chose to enter. The tracing of the human form was especially forbidden in the Koran. This is a reason for their falling back upon arabesques in their decorations. Apparently they are only a beautiful but confused jumble of geometrical lines; and frequently they are nothing more; but these outlines are varied by long texts from the Koran, equally meaningless to the ordinary gazer, but intelligible to the initiated. Nothing can be richer in effect than this decoration, upon which they lavished not only brilliant colours, but unsparingly used the costliest materials, such as turquoise, porphyry, alabaster and jasper, with much gilding, intermixed with every species of beautiful marble, whilst the sheen and changing hues of the mother-of-pearl rivalled their wonderful enamels.

At times their patterns and ornamentations were inlaid in the form of mosaic, at others they were sunk into the walls; again they stood out in relief, fretworks of plaster, the last being the most beautiful and effective. It is singular that the Egyptians and the Arabians should both have employed writing and signs for decorating their walls. The one could not have been an imitation of the other, for when the Arabs conquered Egypt hieroglyphics had long been a lost art, and the Arabs looked upon these characters as mere mystic or cabalistic signs employed by a pagan people.

A very distinctive and beautiful feature of the mosques are the minarets, those light and elegant shafts or towers which the Muezzins ascend five times a day to bid the faithful to prayer. We have already said that to hear the voice ringing out over the city through the clear sparkling air, is a sound never to be forgotten, thrilling one with emotion, and certainly contributing to religious feeling.

Undoubtedly it helps to inspire them with fervour. To see them at their devotions you might think their last hour had come, and that, like Hezekiah, they were praying for an extension of life. How far all this degenerates into a mere matter of form and habit; how far it comes from the heart; how far it influences the daily life for good, we do not know; and it is not for us to judge. Probably there are good and bad, holy and unholy, sincere and insincere, as in all other religions. But that there should be five stated hours for prayer during the day, in which the faithful do and must join, must be a wonderful help to the daily life of those who are striving to walk faithfully in the narrow path of duty.

In nothing is the difference between Egyptian and Arabian art more apparent than in their temples. The one loved lightness and change, the earlier people solidity and repetition. The Egyptians were eminently conservative, the Arabs proverbially fickle. The Egyptians were stationary, calm, peace-loving; the Arabs were a

wandering people, unsettled, dwelling in tents and habitations easily moved, scouring deserts, flying hither and thither on the wings of the wind, passionate, resentful, all fire and energy, impatient of control.

This difference of temperament gives the keynote to all the changes they effected in Egypt after their invasion.

But their own nature, the condition of their lives, was also changing. The doctrines of Mohammed were destined in a great measure to revolutionise the lives of the Arabians, and to infuse into them a certain amount of steadiness and consolidation of character and purpose, for the want of which they had long been degenerating. He obtained such hold upon them by his new religion that henceforth they were to become as bondsmen.

That they gained by the change cannot be disputed. It prepared them for greater things, and when they took Egypt they were ready to make the most of their advantages.

In no place did they reach a higher level. They appeared to rise to the occasion. Nowhere did they become more firmly established; nowhere did their art attain so great a degree of perfection; nowhere have they left behind them more admirable traces.

Would that we could say lasting traces, but in point of art this is evidently not to be. Nothing can be more beautiful than those wonderful buildings, those tombs and mosques, of the eleventh century. To reproduce them would be impossible; and they throw a refinement, a charm and distinction over Cairo that cannot be imagined, but must be seen to be realized. If the intellect is impressed by such stupendous buildings as the Pyramids, imagination, one's sense of the beautiful and the refined, is no less captivated by these wonderful tombs and temples of the Caliphs. But they are not destined to last for ever. Already they are passing to ruin and decay. The Musulman is a fatalist; he argues that what is to be, will be; and nothing is being done to save these matchless buildings from perishing. Their situation also makes them additionally striking, for the tombs were nearly always placed on high ground to keep them from the influence of the river.

Their mosques are of three types, belonging to three periods of time, differing essentially from each other. The earliest are the simplest. The best example of these is the Mosque of Amrou, in Old Cairo. After conquering Egypt, Amrou built the mosque in commemoration of his victory, upon the lines of the Mosque at Mekka. These earlier mosques are of the plainest architecture, and receive their dignity from their destiny and simplicity.

The second period of mosques came under the Mameluke Sultans. Architecture had made great strides by this time, and their buildings were much more complicated. The earlier mosques were light and fragile, as if built only for time—a peculiarity which gave them a certain grace of their own. The mosques of the second period were more seriously and solidly constructed, as if posterity had been thought of

Mosque of Said Pasha, Alexandria.

as well as the present hour. They were meant to last; and in effect they still exist; but, as we have said, if some antiquarian or conservative society—such, for instance, as the Society for the Preservation of Historical Monuments, in France—does not speedily take the matter in hand and rescue these buildings from ruin, their years are numbered. Like all restored monuments, they would lose much of their charm and beauty; but who would not sooner have the ancient temples of Egypt, to some extent, as they once were, rather than the interesting but melancholy remains that now make of the banks of the Nile a sepulchre of the dead?

And of the buildings of the Mamelukes, there would not remain the same vestiges. They constructed upon different lines and knew nothing of the greatness and solidity of the ancient Egyptians. The immense monoliths of the past, the enormous blocks of stone employed in their buildings—these we have said did not appeal to the Arab sense of richness and grandeur. We have seen that they would not even utilise any of the Egyptian columns and monoliths in building their temples, though they lay around them in vast numbers, but preferred the lighter architecture of Rome and Greece. Had it not been so, many of the ruined cities of the Nile which are now the delight of antiquarians, and where the modern tourist loves to picnic, would have disappeared under the sovereignty of the Mamelukes.

We remember one day, *par parenthèse*, going up to Sakkara in a Nile dahabîyeh crowded with many Americans and a few English. Arrived at Mariette's house near the Step Pyramid: confronting the most ancient building in the world, breathing the very air of antiquity, silent with emotion before this mysterious monument of the past: the whole company of tourists, almost without exception, dismounted their donkeys, and began, with loud voices and eager gestures, devouring oranges as if their very existence depended upon the number to be consumed in a given time. The Step Pyramid—the Tomb of Apis? This was not what they had come for; they were "doing Egypt," and wished to make the time pass as pleasantly as it would. We are not exaggerating the scene that took place, or the motives of the travellers. It was the first time we found ourselves in the company of a crowd, and it was the last—romance, feeling, impression, all had to be sacrificed. The crowded state of Cairo had compelled one to visit Sakkara in this manner, or not at all.

We shall return to this memorable day in due time and place.

The mosques of the second period were colossal in point of size; vast, rectangular buildings, adorned with cupolas and minarets, and richly decorated within. This richness has, for the most part faded, but may occasionally be faintly traced, especially in the magnificent pavements of marble mosaic.

In many of these mosques we find representations of the *folding* or pointed arch, very much as we see it in our Gothic monuments.

When this form was first employed is unknown, but there are already traces of it in the corridors of the Great Pyramid, built, as the reader is aware, four thousand years before the Christian era.

It exists in many other buildings of antiquity, and in some of the Byzantine churches at Constantinople. The pointed arch may be seen in the early Mosque of Amrou in Old Cairo. There appears to have been no period of time when it was not used in architecture. It must have entered naturally into design, the result perhaps of necessity, for it is more easily constructed than the semicircle.

The Arabian or Moorish horse-shoe arch is also much found, and, perhaps more than anything else, gives a special and distinctive type to Moorish architecture, for its effect is essentially Oriental.

Outside the Rosetta Gate.

These horse-shoe portals, windows and arcades at once transport you into another world. If you close your eyes, there at once rises up before you a vision of exquisite Moorish buildings: such, for example, as the wonderful Alhambra, which is nothing less than an architectural poem, with its matchless courts and rooms, its long vistas of columns and arcades lacing and interlacing each other; its exquisite windows which frame in the lovely views of the vast plains of the Nevada.

And these mosques and buildings of Old Cairo will not fail to occur equally to the imagination.

Nothing can be more striking. The mind is amazed at their vastness. In their silence and repose they seem to bear witness to a past world, a dead-and-gone people who loved beauty of outline and grace of form,

richness of colouring and decoration, pomp and magnificence, everything, in short, that appealed to the senses. In contradistinction to those ancient Egyptians who loved mystery and mysticism, all that appealed to the soul and the intellect, the unseen, the immortal; who recognised the doctrines of punishment and reward with an impartial sense of justice never exceeded in the most advanced days of Christianity; who, by their symbolism, their architecture, the whole bent and influence of their existence, seemed to account this life as nothing worth in comparison with the next; as if, thousands of years before the words were spoken, they had foreshadowed, had known by spiritual intuition, that the great apostle and martyr would one day exclaim: "I esteem all things well lost if I can only win Christ."

We may well ask: If this people, pagan, primitive, making their own gods, without revelation, without the knowledge that the Divine Creator, instead of being an all-powerful Deity whose wrath and anger had to be appeased, was an Almighty Father whose name was Love, and whose attributes were Long-suffering and Mercy: if they had known this, we may well ask ourselves, to what stupendous efforts, to what glorious results their religious fervour and enthusiasm might not have led them.

The Arabs, of an essentially different nature, have left very different traces behind them. The Egyptians were stable, but the wandering life of the Arabs led to a love of change. Their impressions were quickly roused, and quickly over. Their feelings were acute rather than lasting; the surface of their passions was easily disturbed, but the disturbance was not profound. Nevertheless they were powerful, full of individuality, with manners and customs, with ideas and conceptions of art, that were peculiarly their own. We specially notice this in their architecture. Not an outline, not an idea, would they borrow from the Egyptians.

And so, in going to Egypt we are visiting two distinct worlds, and it would be almost difficult to say which is the more interesting.

And yet, although the Arabs had quickly settled down in Egypt and made themselves masters of the country, they were not to hold undisputed sway there. In taking Egypt they had not imposed a sinecure upon themselves; they could not fold their hands and recline on a bed of roses, and take as assured the possession that had cost them so much. To begin with, the siege of Alexandria had been long and severe and had cost the followers of the false prophet many lives. Heraclius had fled from the town, but it was still in some degree wealthy and thriving, and the inhabitants were very unwilling to fall into the hands of a strange and untried people. Alexandria died gloriously, fighting to the last for independence. In the invaders the Copts recognised people of another religion, which to them meant persecution, perhaps death. The Jews, discontented, murmuring and seditious though they were, felt that to fall into these

THE ISLAND OF RODA.

strange hands was to risk life and liberty, and—what was almost more dear to them than either—wealth.

So the siege lasted for fourteen long months, and the town was at last taken by assault. It is said that 300,000 men commanded by Amrou fell upon the ramparts; blood ran as a river of water; and the Arab soldiers, dauntless, not to be repulsed, rushed in upon the starving populace, the deserted palaces, with fanatical cries of "To death! To Paradise!" which seemed to repeat themselves with a thousand echoes and rise upwards to the very heavens. On the 22nd of December, 640, Alexandria fell.

Amrou was the lieutenant of the Caliph Omar, whose conquest was thus established and whose reign began. He acted with discretion, treated the conquered people with leniency, forbade plunder and pillage, and so ingratiated himself with the Egyptians that an immense number voluntarily ranked themselves under his banner, and became disciples of Islam. In his reforms he followed in the footsteps of those who had gone before; the Pharaohs, the Ptolemies, the Greeks and Romans; and endeavoured to profit by their experience and example. He constructed a canal between the Nile and the Red Sea, paid special attention to irrigation, maintained the dykes in perfect order, devoting a third part of the revenues of the kingdom to these special matters.

And when we consider the geographical position of Egypt, we see how this feature had to take a first place in the affairs of the land.

Egypt itself is an enormous country, equal in size to two-thirds of the extent of Russia in Europe; but a large portion of this territory is desert, incapable of cultivation, uninhabited. The true fruit-bearing portion of Egypt is of very limited area. It lies entirely in the region of the Nile, and in its whole extent is not as large as Belgium.

It is the narrowest country in the world, for only where the waters of the Nile reach the plains in their overflow can seed be sown and harvests gathered. This fruit-bearing soil begins at Khartoum, at the confluence of the Blue and the White Nile, which takes its winding course through Nubia down to the First Cataract, a distance of a little under a thousand miles. Owing to defective irrigation, only a portion can be cultivated.

This was Upper Egypt.

To the irrigation of Lower Egypt more care was given; dykes were cut, canals constructed, the marshy land was drained and redeemed; wealth and prosperity, the happiness and contentment of the people, greatly increased. To all these essential matters Omar gave special attention, and Egypt flourished. But Omar's life was cut short. He had reigned only two years when he perished by the hand of an assassin, who thus avenged what he had considered a personal insult.

Omar was succeeded by Othman, who had been an intimate friend of Mohammed. He reigned eleven years, and was assassinated at the

instigation of Aïcha, the prophet's widow, possibly for some real or supposed injury done to her in the days gone by, when he had used his influence with Mohammed to her prejudice. Mohammed was not scrupulous in the way he treated his wives—whom he divorced for no special reason when it suited his purpose to do so. It was the laws he made in accordance with his sensual nature which caused his religion to appeal so strongly to the Eastern temperament. He must

Old Arabic Enamelled Glass Cup.

also have been of a singularly jealous nature, or the seclusion of the harem would not have been made so complete and inviolable. But with regard to Aïcha, it is more probable that she caused Othman to be put to death in the interest of Ali, the son-in-law of the prophet, who succeeded him.

But the reign of Ali was a very disturbed one; he was never to know peace and security. One war followed another with Moawiyeh

the governor of Syria, who had cast ambitious eyes upon Egypt, and would not be satisfied without its possession.

This he finally obtained by the assassination of Ali in the year 661, and the capital was transferred to Damascus.

Moawiyeh founded the dynasty of the Ommiades, which lasted for a hundred years, and was distinguished by several remarkable events.

The Arabs besieged Constantinople, but were repulsed. The conquest of Africa was completed; the first Arab coin was struck; Spain was conquered by the Moslems, and there, as in Egypt, they left wonderful traces behind them; the first Nilometer was built on the Island of Roda.

The dynasty had been established by frequent wars and much bloodshed, but its reign was active and energetic, and the country prospered. This was followed by the Abbaside dynasty, which took its name from Aboo'l Abbas, a descendant of Mohammed's uncle, in 754.

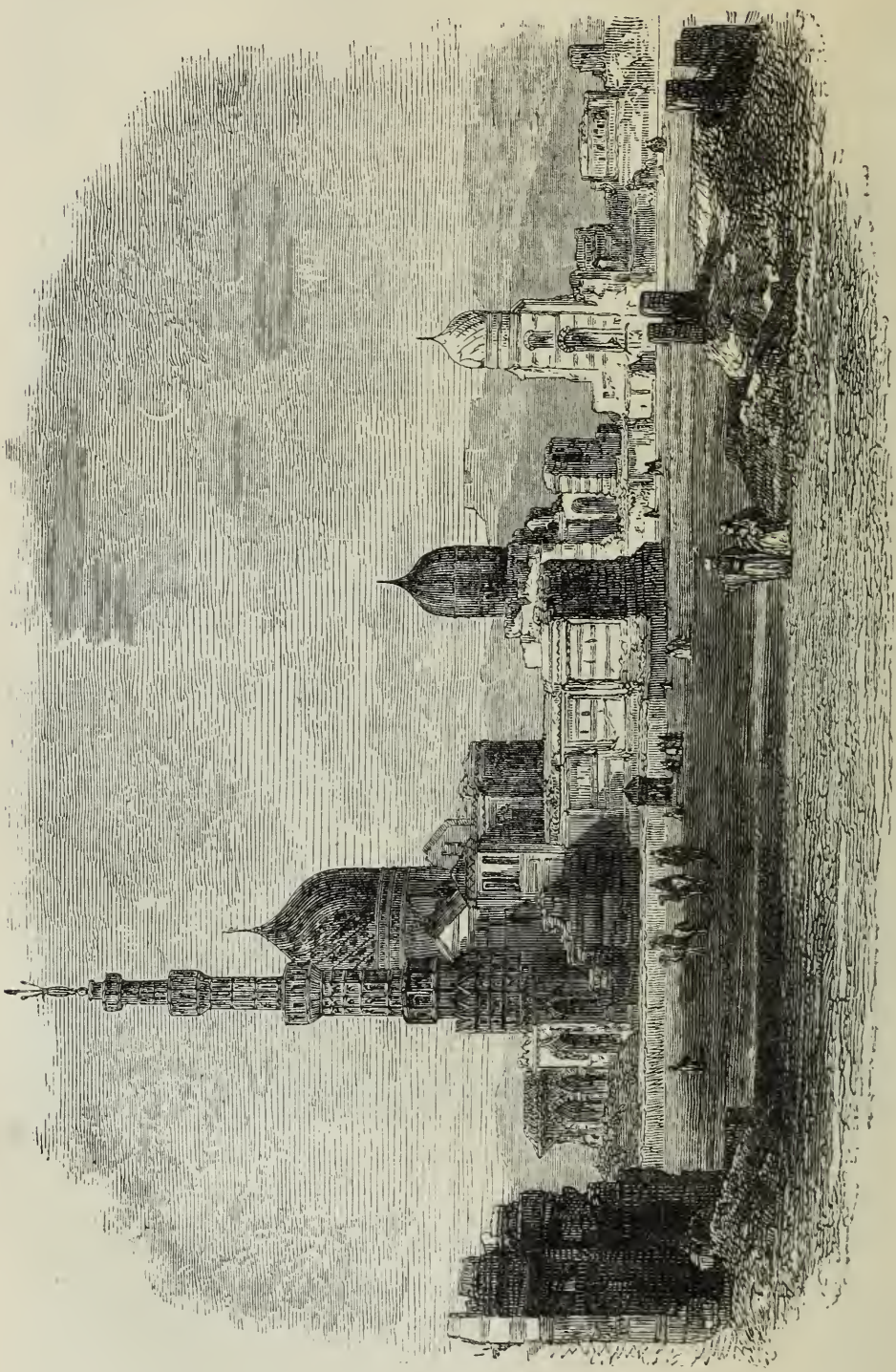
The battle which established this dynasty was fierce and strong, a frightful conflict between the black flags of the Abbasides and the white standards of the Ommiades. Merwan II., the last of the Ommiades, was assassinated in a mosque at Alexandria; and the whole of his relations were invited to a great banquet in Damascus, and there put to death by Aboo'l Abbas, who was thenceforth surnamed the Sanguinary.

One member alone escaped, Abd-er-Rahman, who fled to Spain and established the Ommiade dynasty at Cordova.

Bagdad was founded during the reign of the Abbasides in 754, and became their capital. Haroun al Rasheed, surnamed the Just, was of the dynasty, and has been handed down to posterity as the hero of the Arabian Nights. We know by these tales how vivid an imagination the Arabs possessed, what a love of the marvellous, of splendour and magnificence, bringing magic to their aid; what tyrants and autocrats these Caliphs were, and with what delightful ease and clear conscience they decapitated people and confiscated their property.

It was a son of Haroun who opened the Great Pyramid of Cheops in the hope of finding buried treasures—a hope destined to disappointment. He was accompanied in his work by Dionysius, the Patriarch of Antioch, and a large number of workmen. After much labour they obtained an entrance into the corridors and chambers, and were rewarded by discovering only a vase containing gold coin exactly sufficient in amount to defray their expenses. The vessel itself is said to have been an enormous emerald, and was taken to Bagdad. Altogether the account sounds very much like an Arabian Nights' story. The vase is supposed to have been secretly conveyed there by Mamoon himself, in order that his expedition should not be stamped as a complete failure. A mysterious slab was also found near the vase, setting forth that the treasure contained in the vessel was to pay for the work of the inquisitive king, but that if he searched further he

would find nothing more. At this period the sons of Charlemagne were dividing Europe amongst themselves.



A Tomb of the Caliphs.

Then came the Tooloonide dynasty.
Its first monarch made himself governor of Egypt, declared him-

self independent of the Caliphs, and took possession of the whole country. He was celebrated for his splendour and magnificence, his wealth, and his success as a conqueror. He also built the wonderful mosque in Cairo which bears his name.

Other and unimportant dynasties rapidly succeeded, until in 958 the Fatimites of Southern Africa conquered Egypt and began a brilliant career. Everything prospered; the population increased, and the whole commerce of the Indies and the interior of Africa flowed towards Egypt. Cairo became its capital. The town, enlarged and beautified, rivalled Alexandria and Bagdad, and numbered more than two hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants. A university was established and a famous library, four hundred mosques were built, magnificent wells, baths, and aqueducts. Cairo became one of the chief cities of the world.

But the dynasty was not to last. Dissensions had been frequent, the Christians had been persecuted, and many of them had turned Musulmans. The Turcomans, who had been gradually rising into power, attacked Egypt, but were unsuccessful for the moment. Jerusalem was taken from the Turks and other Syrian towns, but the Crusaders came forward under Godfrey de Bouillon, and recaptured them.

The last of the Fatimites, unable to keep his kingdom, appealed to the Turcomans and the Kurds, who came to his rescue, with Amaury king of Jerusalem. The latter tried to gain possession of Egypt, but as he approached Cairo, Fostat—that portion founded by Tooloon and enlarged by the Fatimites—was burnt, and he had to retire.

The Ayoubite dynasty commenced with the famous Saladin, and his Saracen army. His career was brilliant and eventful. He obtained possession of Syria as well as of Egypt, defeated the Crusaders at the Battle of Hattin and retook Jerusalem, overthrowing the Christian kingdom in Palestine. He was victorious in the Third Crusade, although Frederick Barbarossa, Philip Augustus, and Richard Cœur de Lion were against him in the field. By him the citadel and city walls of Cairo were built, and the town was in many other ways improved.

But it was not until about the year 1220 that Egypt had very much to do with the Crusaders; soon after which the famous Mameluke dynasty came into power.

The word Mameluke—or Mamlûk—implies slave, and these Mamelukes were purchased by the Sultans in the first instance and trained as soldiers, to form a body guard and to increase the army. They were born Christians, and at the age of seven or eight years were brought over from Georgia and the Caucasus, by the slave-dealers of Constantinople, and sold to the beys. They were fair children and grew into strong, well-made men, but the land of Egypt was not favourable to them. As a rule they married Circassians or strangers, but their children usually died in youth. Where they married

Egyptians, the race died out in the third generation; so that the Mamelukes had constantly to be reinforced by fresh importations from the Caucasus.

These Circassians or Mamelukes eventually possessed themselves of the kingdom, and then began a terribly unsettled period; a time of internal and external wars, of every species of crime, of revolutions, of infinite trouble and disturbance, all tending to the downward progress of the country.

During the two hundred and sixty-seven years that the dynasty lasted, forty-seven monarchs sat upon the throne, and almost all of them met with a violent death.

Yet it was these same Mamelukes who have left the most wonderful architectural traces behind them; and but for them, Cairo to-day would be infinitely less beautiful and attractive than it is. They were of two races—the Bahrites and the Circassians. The former took their name from the Island of Roda, on the Nile or *Bahr*, where they had their barracks. Bebars was the first and most famous of these Sultans, and began his reign in 1260. Had they all followed in his footsteps the reign of the Mamelukes might have been one of the most distinguished in the annals of the country. Barkuk was the first of the Circassians, and began to reign in 1382, from which time the land was nothing but a series of civil wars and of frightful atrocities. In 1517, the dynasty was finally overthrown by Selim I. of Constantinople, and Egypt became a Turkish Pashalic.

The Mamelukes were not exterminated or banished. Their aristocracy was left to them upon certain conditions, and they still held power and authority in the land. Selim endeavoured to secure their allegiance by granting them favours. He created one a pasha, twenty-four he made governors or princes of provinces; he organised a special corps of Mamelukes and these were the finest men of his army.

The result of this was that they became too powerful, and in 1646, the Mamelukes rose up, and by a sort of *coup d'état*, obtained the ascendency and declared themselves independent. In 1798, when the French expedition took place, they were ruling selfishly and despotically throughout the land.

Then came the Battle of the Pyramids under Napoleon. Seven thousand Mamelukes were slaughtered, three thousand escaped into Upper Egypt, twelve hundred fled to Syria. After them came the English, and finally closed the chapter.

The reign of the Arabs was virtually over. That long line, which had begun in the year 641, had gone through so many vicissitudes and changes, had accomplished such wonderful results, had so transformed the face of the country, the character of the people, was at an end.

And in visiting Egypt to-day, you are still surrounded by traces of this singular, erratic, energetic and magnificent race. You wander amidst the mosques of the Sultans, the tombs of the Caliphs, and

you feel as if you had been transplanted into the region of the Arabian Nights, where magic has been at work, and where a people have existed without parallel on earth, almost belonging to some other and fairer world than this. You lose yourself in a dream of Oriental grandeur and sublimity. Every breath you draw in this Eastern atmosphere seems impregnated with the incense of Arabian spices, the perfume of roses. The longer you gaze, the greater becomes the charm and fascination of your surroundings. You revel in a perfect intoxication of sunshine and Eastern glory. You are bewildered by these traces of the past, this realization of dreams and thoughts that you had hitherto only known in Oriental literature; scarcely imagined could exist out of the poet's fancy.

But here the dreams and fancies are indeed embodied; here are the magic palaces, the wonderful skies; you are steeped in rainbow hues; it is an earthly paradise—an Eastern paradise; a paradise full of the vestiges of the days gone by, distinguished by beauty and refinement; outlines that stand out against the sky with the utmost grace of conception. The grandeur, the vastness, the mystic element of the ancient Egyptians, all this is not in evidence. In place of it, you have the refinement, the rich imagery, the fervent and vivid imagination of an Eastern people, realized and embodied in a series of wonderful buildings, that in conjunction with the charm of antiquity, and the halo of romance thrown over them by their condition of partial ruin, stand out matchless and solitary amidst the great artistic creations of the world.

AMATA AND BENEVOLENTIA.

The sun of love shines on her; all the air
  Is warm with adulation; only she
Like marble statue, flushed and made more fair
  By rosy radiance, still stands cold and free
From sign of yielding. Glad, and well aware
  Of the most genial brightness, as a tree
Expands its leaves to meet the noon-tide glare,
  So basks she in love's light contentedly.
Yet one who lives for ever in the shade,
  Unloved, unsought, is more supremely blest;
  She loves, and in the loving finds her rest;
Asking for naught again, is three times paid.
  What matters outward gloom?—The heart's close shrine
  Is all aglow with colours half divine.

EMMA RHODES.

"JENNY WREN."

By Ada M. Trotter.

"A LETTER from Robin!" quoth Miss Sarah. "Now perhaps we shall get to the bottom of this strange silence of his."

Miss Sarah, as she stood well in the light of the morning sun, was not exactly a fascinating type of woman. She was tall and lank, her face wore a severe expression, her eyes were keen and sharp. She was the kind of person who never connects herself with those to whom the "Thou shalt not" is aimed; commandments passed over her head to the feeble folk who cannot be a law unto themselves. As an example, Miss Sarah went to church, and sat there unflinchingly at her post in the equally grim, unflinching pew. Miss Sarah was a leading spirit, but, in her own heart she acknowledged her limitations; in her scientific work, there were times when she had to stand aside while her brother's deeply reflective, original brain made the deductions which it took her hours of laborious work to follow. Miss Sarah was no fool, she recognised her limitations, but within them she was a tyrant, ruling Robin, her only relative, with a rod of iron, so that outside of his work he scarcely dared express a contrary opinion to that advanced by his sister. This does not prove that Robin was necessarily a weakling in character, it is rather suggestive that Miss Sarah could be—was very dominant.

Robin was less vigorous in physique than Miss Sarah, so an attack of influenza brought him to the boundary-land of all knowledge, and he was recalled only after anxious hours of watching; then he was sent for three months to the Riviera. Miss Sarah went on so far as she was able with his scientific work, receiving suggestions occasionally from the absent scientist; but lately his brief letters had been more brief than ever, so Miss Sarah perceived his handwriting to-day with satisfaction.

"I'll read it as I take my breakfast," she soliloquised, slowly cutting open the envelope.

Miss Sarah *did* read the letter, but her breakfast was sent away untouched, while she paced the study with hasty strides, all but swearing in her wrath.

"Dear Sarah,—I'm married. I daresay it will be nice for you to have a woman's company sometimes when you are tired of your work. I shall be home next week. You will love Jenny, I am sure; she is very pretty and intelligent."

"When *I* want a woman's company," said Miss Sarah, "I will choose the woman. Married! She is very pretty! Oh, Robin, you

fool! you fool! Is there no man who can look below the surface, and seek for more in woman than pretty looks? Fool! fool! fool!"

She stamped her foot with rage, a hideous expression convulsed her features. Then she calmed herself, and glanced round the study at the abstruse works lining the walls from floor to ceiling; she remembered Robin's absent-minded habits, his intense application to his work, and—smiled. It was a cruel, hard smile.

"Pretty, intelligent, loved! My lady will have to be something more than these to oust me from my place at Robin's right hand. And—she *can* not, *shall* not!"

It was a bright April day when Robin handed his young wife from the carriage, and led her through the old-fashioned garden to the threshold of his home. Miss Sarah, stiff and severe, stood at the open door.

"Here is our little song bird, my little Jenny Wren," said the philosopher, as deeply in love as a philosopher knows how to be. "She is a sunbeam, and will make the old home cheerful for us sages."

"I don't like a noise," said Miss Sarah, harshly, giving Jenny a cold hand to shake, "and I don't like changes. If you want amusement and gaiety, you ought not to have married, Robin."

The brightness died out of the girl's young face; she looked at Robin for protection from this cruel tongue, but Robin, always influenced by his sister's opinion, looked at the pink and white young creature as though he realised all at once that she did not harmonise with the surroundings—the dull, prim old home—the prim, precise Miss Sarah.

"I am young," said Jenny's clear treble, trembling a little, "but I can learn. At school they said I was quick, and—and—I mean to help Robin, not hinder him."

Miss Sarah's laugh was aimed at this speech. It cut like a knife into the sensitive girl's heart; deriding such effort, such appalling ignorance of the depth of knowledge required by one who would help a scientist.

Robin should have interposed on Jenny's behalf, but Robin was not of a sensitive temperament, and his abstruse studies had not sharpened his perceptions. He had come to the wise conclusion also by this time, that he had married Jenny as much for Sarah's sake as his own; and of course the women thus brought together would love one another, so he strolled off to look at the pile of letters awaiting him without a qualm, leaving Jenny to Miss Sarah's tender mercies.

What Miss Sarah made the sensitive girl suffer in that brief hour, a life-time of happiness could scarcely blot out; but not a sign did Jenny give of the pain she felt. White as a wraith, she accepted all in silence—this was Robin's sister; she had promised Robin to love his sister.

"And," said Miss Sarah, finally, when the survey of the house was over, "as you are so young and fond of amusement, *I* shall continue to keep the keys, and do duty as housekeeper. You can make the tea if you like—that's a fussy kind of thing I don't care for, people have such whims about sugar and cream. Brains are intended for better work than remembering such nonsense. Robin always has had to drink his tea as I chose to make it at the moment. But you've got nothing better to do, you can take it in hand."

A red spot burned in Jenny's cheeks; her blue eyes gave a look into Miss Sarah's face that affected the grim woman strangely. It was a rebuke, the first the lady had ever received for years untold. She pushed aside an obtrusive idea that the young creature before her, notwithstanding her beauty, had plenty of character within this pink and white envelope.

Any latent hope left to Jenny of being a comfort and help to Robin in his work was soon destroyed. Determined not to be thrust aside by Miss Sarah, she quietly entered the study, and made her way to her husband's side. She bore a vase of sweet peas in her hand, which she set beside the workers; the fragrance from the cluster-roses at her belt pervaded the room with their lovely messages. Miss Sarah took no notice of the intruder, she went on with her work without the quiver of an eyelid. Robin on the other hand lifted dreamy, abstracted eyes, gazing at Jenny as though she were but a vision, not in any way connected with his life. As she set down the vase of flowers he appeared to collect his thoughts.

"Now, Robin," said she, with the beaming smile of youth and hope, "I am ready to help you."

Robin awoke to reality, for the nonce the philosopher in love. He took a sheet at random from a pile at his side, passed it over to her with an indulgent smile.

"Copy that," said he.

Jenny sat down quietly. She did not intrude her personality. In five minutes even Miss Sarah had forgotten she was there. In five more minutes she had glided noiselessly away. Her page was copied with exquisite neatness. Why had Jenny fled? Ere one line was finished she had seen through Robin's artifice. It was a wholly unnecessary piece of work; he was treating her as a toy, a child. All the woman in Jenny rose in rebellion, and she stole softly away—never to return.

"Give me that page," said Miss Sarah's harsh voice, when Robin exclaimed wonderingly, "Why, Jenny's gone away!"

"She writes a good hand, better than you or I; firm and neat," was the grim verdict. Robin did not hear it, he was deep in abstract thought. Miss Sarah got up viciously, took the sweet peas and tossed them out of the window into the garden, where Jenny passing shortly afterwards found them wilting in the sun.

It was a terrible life to the young girl; she felt as though in prison,

not daring to alter so much as the position of one of the grim old chairs. Everything in the house had its place, and the old servants, jealous as Miss Sarah of changes, were quick to resent the slightest innovation. Day by day plunged Robin deeper into his grand work on astronomy; he was scarcely conscious of claims on his heart; he might have been dead and buried so far was he beyond Jenny's power of recall. Perhaps, like Miss Sarah, he too was beyond being affected by commandments. He had bidden Jenny from the first to amuse herself, and naturally his duty to her began and ended with the kindly order.

Amuse herself! There was not even a kitten on the premises, and the yard dog was a vicious old beast that dragged at his chain, and would have torn the new-comer to pieces had he been able to get loose. The only amusement left for Jenny was to take long walks over the moors, and this amusement palled to such a degree, that had Robin watched her movements through his fine telescope with the same interest with which he studied the far-off stars, he might have speculated as to the nature of the crystals which sped in rapid succession from her eyes, as she threw herself in an abandon of misery on the heather.

After the first few days Jenny never sang about the house, she made no noise. Robin did not notice the change. The clear skies were giving him chances, which he had not had for years, of making solar observations, and he worked unremittingly, scarce giving himself necessary rest by day and by night. He claimed Sarah's help as a matter of course, and such intense labour, and night watches, disagreed with the grim woman's temper, which became so frigidly austere that the sensitive-plant drooped in her atmosphere. Yet, withal, Sarah had eyes; she saw everything that Robin was blind to, and, as the servants all agreed, she had never been so outrageously cross in her life.

A pile of cards had been gradually accumulating during the last few weeks. Miss Sarah turned them over with some contempt—still, she knew Robin must keep up with the world, and friends cannot be absolutely neglected.

"Robin," she said, "these calls must be returned."

"Well," said he, "why not? Jenny can return them."

"No," said Jenny, in a clear low tone. "I will not."

"She is right," said Sarah, calmly. "You must go with her. Take to-day; it is fine; order the carriage early. The 'Bridges' live eight miles off, they are old friends; you can go there first. If you are in time for lunch so much the better; they will be overjoyed."

"But, Sarah, could not you——" began Robin.

"I am not Jenny's husband," said Sarah, acidly. "If a man marries he must expect to have to go out with his wife on occasion. Don't attempt to put these calls off on me. Besides, you've done too much night work lately, and we shall have you ill again and off

to the South, and Heaven knows what other absurdity you may perform!"

"He can scarcely marry another wife," said Jenny, with cool scorn; "he has already made the one irretrievable blunder."

Miss Sarah carefully put on her spectacles and peered at the young bride.

"You'd better go and get yourself ready for the trip. Take a warm shawl; it's cold on the moors," said she, in her strident tone. Then, without another word, went down to the study and set to work to copy Robin's observations of the night before.

Presently she heard Jenny's laugh. It had a pathetic ring in its young freshness. Miss Sarah frowned ominously, she rose and went to the window; the carriage was at the door, and Jenny had just taken her seat by Robin, who was smiling down at her in a wholly unphilosophic manner which suffused the girl's pale face with a glow of lovely pink. Miss Sarah stood frowning at the pair, portentously; she had never looked so severe in her life, but, hidden behind the curtain, her face was not visible to dethrone joy from Jenny's heart. When the happy couple were out of sight, she went back to her work, but somehow she could not fix her mind on what she was doing. In less than an hour she seemed to form a sudden resolution; she left the study, and, with determined tread, made her way to Jenny's room, where the young girl alone had undisputed sway.

Miss Sarah knew she had no right there, but then she was above the commandments, above being affected by rules which govern ordinary folk, so she entered without hesitation and proceeded to rummage.

On a table by the window was a neat pile of school-books, evidently called into daily requisition. Miss Sarah sniffed contemptuously.

"Out of date centuries ago," she muttered, "just the usual science smattering dealt out at girls' schools." Then she came upon a list of studies, formidable enough in Jenny's eyes, absurd in those of the experienced student; but this was soon dropped, for Miss Sarah's ferretting glance had caught sight of a diary.

"Bless me, what a baby, to keep a diary!" sneered Miss Sarah, as she opened the sacred pages without a qualm. But as she read, the sneer died away from her grim countenance; here she found the cruel sufferings Jenny had endured painted in glowing words. She saw herself just as she appeared in these young eyes, an odd sensation to Miss Sarah, almost as though she had been dead and buried and had returned to her old haunts, seeing with spirit eyes instead of "through a glass, darkly."

"It is strange," wrote Jenny, after this relation, "that, harsh and severe as she uniformly appears to be, there is something about her I could love, if she would let me. But she is above being loved. She is so strong, so sufficient to herself. I dared one night to kiss her; she did not like it"—"Yes, she did, though," interpolated Miss Sarah —"and I shall never dare take such a liberty again. Was she ever

young? and did she ever care for flowers and sunshine? Had she ever a lover?"

With a sudden snap Miss Sarah turned the page.

"If I only knew what they were doing, what this great scientific work was to prove; but they never deign to mention the theme in my hearing! Night by night they watch the stars; how I long for the opportunity! I do not know anything; but I can learn. I hate science! It makes people so hard, so self-satisfied, and shuts them within such narrow walls. The stars are more to Robin than his wife; he cares for the smallest information he can gain concerning them, but for human beings he does not care. It is nothing to him that I suffer, that I long for a wider, broader life. I am a prisoner chained to a cruel doom. Were I to be burned at the stake, death would put an end to my miseries; but here am I doomed to death in life. My imagination is repressed; my heart is killed in this icy atmosphere; my youth is dying with my heart. Oh, Robin, Robin! Is not the human soul eternal as the heavens? You should help me, Robin, to a higher flight amongst your stars; read me, Robin, with as deep a longing for intelligence of what is hidden in my heart, as you read the skies!"

Miss Sarah threw the diary aside; something very queer was touching her eyes with a film. A vigorous rubbing brought her keen vision to order, and it showed her some dainty needlework in a basket on the table. Miss Sarah peered at it long ere she mastered the purpose of the production. It was a cap of real Mechlin lace, and evidently, the grim woman perceived, intended for herself. She put it on—very much awry, it is true, but to her own satisfaction, admiring the effect with a simplicity of soul pertaining only to the scientific. Then she set it back in its place, and fingered the few knick-knacks Jenny's scanty purse had enabled her to purchase when abroad. She scowled severely at the muslin curtains and the general air of elegance with which the girl had invested her poor little properties, then suddenly strode out of the room and returned to her work. She frowned so much for the rest of the day that even the old servants were alarmed, and went about their work fearing an unwonted explosion.

When the absent pair came home in the gloaming, and Jenny's laugh, merry now, without that pathetic ring which had weighted its freshness in the morning, startled the gloomy echoes into serious remonstrance, Miss Sarah's rather bass voice was heard from the open hall door.

"Oh, you're back, are you? I want my tea. I am used now to Jenny's way of making it, and I can't fancy it otherwise."

Grim as was this speech, it struck like a warm wave on Jenny's ear. She fairly ran indoors.

"I'll be ready in a moment, Sarah," said she, and her step went blithely up to her room.

When she returned she carried her work-basket on her arm, glancing

from its contents rather timidly at Miss Sarah. That grim woman was seated in a stiff arm-chair by the fire-place; she had an antiquated piece of canvas in her lap, and was threading a needle, frowning hideously at the difficulties presented by the ravelling silk.

"Get out of my light!" said she, with severity, as she chased the needle with increasing asperity and absorbed interest. Jenny stood aside, exclaiming with rapture at the exquisite colours overflowing Miss Sarah's black apron.

"Florentine," snapped the austere one. "I began it twenty years ago; it's about time I finished it."

There was something in Miss Sarah's manner that might have answered one of Jenny's questions had she been on the alert—"Had she ever a lover?"; but of course the girl had no idea that her sacred diary had been overhauled.

"For my part," said Miss Sarah, as she sipped her tea, "I am inclined for a social evening; I'll get on with my work, and Jenny can sing to us presently."

Robin looked his surprise, his utter bewilderment; Jenny flushed. What strange development was this? A social evening in this gloomy house!

"Tell me where you went to-day," continued Miss Sarah, conjuring a smile to her severe lips. "I suspect we shall have all the world here after your wife, Robin."

Robin rubbed his head ruefully. The look he cast at Sarah was hopeless, bewildered. She who always helped him out of his difficulties was now apparently bent on plunging him into deep waters.

Jenny was setting a few finishing touches to the lacework; then, with the sweetest grace in the world, made her presentation.

"Humph!" said Miss Sarah. "You'd better put it on for me. Which is front and which is back? I'll wear it for best, and you can make me something for everyday."

"Just what I was longing to do," said Jenny, accepting this ungraceful speech with delight, reading in it what she valued more than effusive thanks. Her mood became charmingly bright. Miss Sarah watched her pretty ways with severe attention, and her needle fairly whizzed through the canvas, cobbling the artistic pattern cruelly as her keen brain made some deductions, leading her to a conclusion which would have stranded Robin a helpless, shipwrecked mariner had he been able to follow his sister's lead. But Robin was dreamily listening to Jenny's prattle, and afterwards, soothed by the pretty ballads she sang to him, dozed by the fireside.

Next morning Jenny felt less left out in the cold than usual, for Miss Sarah turned back at the door to say, in her rough way—

"When we've got these calculations all right, you had better come and do some copying for us. Robin writes so badly the printers can't decipher his meaning, and, as for me, I'm not much better; you're quiet, quick, and careful."

With a nod, almost a threat at failure of such qualities, Miss Sarah vanished, leaving Jenny so light of heart that she had to stop herself several times in a glad rill of song.

"She warbles like a bird," observed Miss Sarah.

"Who? Eh—what?" from the absorbed Robin.

"I say Jenny's voice is sweet as a blackbird's," said Miss Sarah severely.

"I did not hear anything," said Robin, as he fell back into his well of thought.

But in the afternoon the door-bell rang incessantly; all the world seemed to come to call on Robin's charming wife. Jenny appeared at the study door; one look at Robin, a warning glance from Miss Sarah, and she retired to do the honours alone. When she gave a graphic description of the callers in the evening, Miss Sarah heard her with a thoughtful rather than severe expression. At one name she gave a grim "Humph!"

"Dacres back again!" cried Robin. "We must invite him to spend an evening. You remember Dacres at Florence, Sarah?"

There was not a doubt on the subject in Miss Sarah's snappish "Of course."

"So you are going to be very gay—dear me," said Robin. "If you accept all the invitations showered broadcast over us, you will have your time cut out for you."

He was twirling a card in his hand; "Basil Dacres" was engraved thereon. Miss Sarah took it from him.

"Ah, I see it is the son. I knew there was a son. Where did you meet him, Jenny?"

"He knew my aunt," said Jenny, colouring, "and he was engaged to be married to my cousin Susan; then—he jilted her."

"Fell in love with the first pretty face he saw, I suppose," growled Miss Sarah, guessing shrewdly enough what Jenny was too modest to tell. "Just like his father."

"I shall certainly go and see old Dacres," said Robin, whose mind was far away as usual, and who did not notice Jenny's confusion or Miss Sarah's remark. But in a few moments Robin's interest in his old friend was forgotten in his work.

Jenny was intensely proud. She did not choose to go out under the wing of the rector's wife, since wherever she went she was met by pitying looks, for gossip was rife about the peculiar habits of the scientists, and gossip was certain that this pale pretty creature was cruelly neglected, even ill-treated, at home. Then the advent of Basil Dacres overwhelmed her with difficulties, for he was a vain man, always ready with sentimental nothings, and wherever Jenny went followed in her train. Jenny gave up her long walks over the moors, for Basil seemed to pervade them far and near, and at length kept within the very narrow boundaries of the prim old garden, denying herself to all visitors indiscriminately. Here in the arbour the young

creature ate her heart out in the dull dead life, and gave up, one by one, the visions hope had held before her eyes—of domestic happiness and of intellectual growth. At length she accepted a fresh vision, which was a natural growth of this death in life. Robin did not want her; she would go away somewhere and work for the world. She would not try to be happy—happiness was not for her—but she might be of service to others. She would be a missionary and go out to India to teach the poor women in the Zenanas; but when poor Jenny got as far as India, away from Robin, she usually dissolved in tears in misery words would not voice.

Sometimes the rector with his kindly wife penetrated the barriers set up to keep them out, descended on Jenny in the arbour, and dragged her forth to some party or picnic; but Jenny returned from such excursions more wretched than ever, and persisted in erecting her barriers stronger than before.

Miss Sarah watched the girl grow pale and wan with a feeling of irritation for which she could not account.

"You don't go out enough," she said, not unkindly; "you want air and exercise."

Jenny made no reply. Air and exercise would not heal the wounds in her sore heart, she thought, her clear eyes—faded as her cheeks—gravely meeting the penetrating gaze of Miss Sarah.

"What's this? Dacres' writing, eh? Picnic to the old Castle to-morrow. You have not seen the ruins, Jenny?"

"I have seen nothing," said Jenny gravely; "but that does not make any difference. I shall not go."

Jenny went languidly into the garden. Sarah stood by the window and watched her fair head until it was lost amidst the ungainly shrubs. She frowned severely, and instead of joining Robin in the study, put on her stiff best bonnet and went forth to call on some old busybodies from whom she knew she should hear some home-truths. She came home remarkably cross; home-truths strike none the less hard because those concerned consider themselves superior to such generalisations.

"By the way," said Robin, as they dined, "Dacres and the rector bearded me in my den this afternoon—made me promise to let Jenny join the picnic to-morrow. Of course I refused for you, Sarah. You don't care for such things, or I; besides which, we have not a minute to spare. I am dreadfully behind-hand with those proofs, and those men detained me this afternoon; I lost an hour at least."

Miss Sarah, still very cross, was staring into her wine-glass, and made no answer.

"I do not wish to go without you and Sarah," said Jenny, a stern expression settling on her pale face.

"Oh, if you wait for us," said Robin good-temperedly, "I fear the summer will pass by before you get an opportunity to see anything."

Jenny seemed as though she were making a great effort to speak, but, as she raised her eyes, she met the keen glance in Miss Sarah's, and her lips trembled in silence.

"It has not occurred to you, I suppose, Robin, that Jenny seems to avoid all kinds of pleasure parties?" asked Sarah, as they took their places at the telescope an hour later.

"I don't like them myself," said Robin tranquilly. "Still, she can't very well get out of this, and young people often have fads and fancies."

"I imagine some of your wife's fads might be worth your attention, Robin," said Sarah grimly. "However she happened to fall in love with you, I don't see. I should think she would fall out quickly enough at your neglect of her."

"Neglect?" cried Robin. "Why, I let her do just as she likes; I never interfere with her wishes in anything."

"That definition is equally good," said Miss Sarah snappishly. But Robin was already lost in the trackless universe overhead; Miss Sarah's sarcasm was not audible to ears that strained for the music of the "wandering stars."

The next day Jenny invaded the study—a lovely vision enough, in her rustic gown and broad hat, the sunlight seemed concentrated about her; but the young face surrounded by this halo was anxious and careworn.

"Robin, dear Robin, can I speak to you?"

"Eh, Jenny?" Robin was still in the clouds.

"Robin, the rector's wife is ill, and Mr. Dacres has sent Basil to fetch me to go with their party, and I do not want——"

"Very kind of Dacres, very attentive. Just like him!" said Robin absently, ceasing to see Jenny, the sunlight, or aught else on this mundane sphere.

Jenny drew back; a stern glance, almost of contempt, hardened her lovely features; she paused, as though to assure herself that Robin was indeed oblivious of her existence, then she left the room slowly, deliberately. At the door she paused again, her dry lips spoke but once. "Good-bye, Robin!" and these words came soft as a breath, scarcely audible to the sharpest ears. Then she closed the study door and slowly set foot on the stairs.

She did not hear the hasty stride which annihilated the distance between the desk by the window and the door, nor did she notice the noisy click of the latch; but she turned at the sound, the music of a rough deep voice.

"Just set my cap straight, Jenny, and wipe the ink off my forehead —that quill of mine spatters so. Do I look very frowsy?"

"You look," said Jenny—"you look like—like an angel!" And she suddenly put out her arms and clung about the grim woman's neck.

"Robin's a fool!" said Miss Sarah grimly to herself. "But, thank Heaven! I've got more than my share of wits."

"So good of you to come for us," she was saying the next moment to the self-possessed young man, whom she scanned with a curious scrutiny, as he impatiently glanced from her to Jenny. "I have not seen the Castle for years. Robin and I have worked too hard lately, so we have depended on our good rector and his wife to take care of our song-bird here. But I need change, and shall take every chance that offers for an outing in future."

Basil Dacres made polite response; but his lowering brow spoke of anything rather than joy at the prospect of improving his acquaintance with Miss Sarah.

"Jenny—I mean Mrs. Robin—and I are old friends," began Basil.

"Very delightful," said Miss Sarah amiably. "You were engaged to her cousin, I believe, at one time. Is that your dog-cart? Jenny will sit behind, she does not mind where she rides; but I take up a great deal of room, and, besides, I see you have a great deal to tell me about your first acquaintance with Mrs. Robin."

Jenny, who was deftly arranging Miss Sarah's bonnet and mantle, gave the grim woman's hand a sudden squeeze. Perhaps the twinkle in the keen eyes dissecting the enraged young man before her, was suggestive of enjoyment in Miss Sarah at finding herself thus dominant. Basil felt himself ludicrous, especially as an imploring glance from his dark eyes met with a response utterly unprecedented from Jenny—a merry rill of laughter; for he was not to know that Miss Sarah's interposition meant a reprieve to Jenny—that the little portmanteau ready packed upstairs would never see India or the Zenana Mission field—that Miss Sarah's grim smile into the troubled blue eyes had carried healing to a sorely-wounded heart. As to himself, and his tendency to play the lover to the first pretty face that fell within his horizon, there was no fear that Jenny would be annoyed by his absurd sentimentalisms with Miss Sarah as a rock of strength by her side.

The splendid horses distanced the rest of the party, and, if Miss Sarah had one constitutional source of timidity which rendered her a wreck of herself when seated behind a pair of spirited horses, Basil Dacres was never the wiser. Jenny, sitting at the back of the carriage by herself, sang gaily in a light-hearted blithe manner that brought a smile to her grim relative's lips. What a feast these lovely woodlands after the dull, dreary house and garden—what a joy these rippling streams! And, oh! the drifting shadows upon the sun-glinted forest paths.

Miss Sarah meanwhile drew the young man out upon a variety of subjects, which he rarely brought into conversational play.

"So you are not a classical scholar? Your father was. We fell out on the subject twenty-five years ago. He would not learn any modern languages—a great mistake. A most obstinate man on some subjects."

"He is indeed," said Basil, remembering some late passages in which he himself had gone, as he graphically related to friends, "all to pieces," in discussions of his future with his parent. But the Castle

came into sight, and the ladies descended at the entrance to the woods surrounding it, to wait for the rest of the party.

"You'd better give me your arm, Jenny," said Miss Sarah, "I'm a little stiff with sitting in such a cramped position."

So when the rest of the party came up, they found Jenny beaming and happy as a bird, under Miss Sarah's wing. The meeting between Miss Sarah and Mr. Dacres the elder was significant; to say the least, the glances exchanged were belligerent. But later in the afternoon, when interest in the ruins had given place to interest in the gipsy-kettle, Mr. Dacres deliberately crossed swords with his enemy.

"I brought him up on your principles," said he, nodding towards Basil. "He is modern in every respect; you would not undertake the charge, so I struggled with the problem unaided."

"Humph! Rather a dandy!" said Miss Sarah, reflectively, "but I dare say he'll improve."

"There's room for it," growled Dacres the elder, with his mental eye on the extravagant habits of his son. "You have worn well, Sarah!" There was a tender intonation in the words which received a belligerent glance from the grim woman.

"Science agrees with me," she replied, "but you——" perhaps her eyes spoke for her.

"Yes! I'm too fat! I really can't help it, Sarah. It ages a man though, undoubtedly. I've had too little exercise out in India."

And Jenny sitting on the moss beside Miss Sarah, leaning against her rock of strength, sent forth her merry laugh and innocent jests from this safe covert, little thinking that the stout old gentleman, conversing so agreeably, had once been an ardent lover, and that Miss Sarah had been the object of his affection.

Meantime the tide of gossip was turned for ever.

"Why, I thought they were at daggers drawn, and it is clear Mrs. Robin and her sister-in-law are inseparable."

A week or two later Miss Sarah came down to breakfast ready equipped for a journey; after making a pretence of eating, she suddenly rose and went out. She was gone without a word of farewell, and left no address. Robin stared helplessly at Jenny, when at length they realised that she really had departed bag and baggage.

"I am so busy," said he. "What in the world shall I do? It is most inconsiderate of Sarah. All those proofs to look over"—he pointed to several unopened bundles. "Can you come and help me, Jenny?"

With Jenny's entrance into the study, Robin became a mere working machine no longer. Little by little his mind broadened to human interests, and he watched the changes brought into his precincts by this busy little woman with a feeling that his youth had begun at last, and that life held a charm of which he had hitherto been unconscious. Still he missed Sarah's fine mind and hard-working quality, and, had

he known where to find her, would have implored her to return to the old harness. But Sarah was gone, and no word was heard from her for two years.

Her return was as unexpected as her departure. She arrived at the garden-gate and walked into the house. Everything was changed, the prim lines were broken, even the cross old yard-dog was gone. Miss Sarah nodded her grim head at the elegance with which she was surrounded, then her eyes twinkled on Robin who was watching her with some anxiety.

"I like it," she said. "I declare Robin you look twenty years younger. What's the matter, Jenny?"

"Why," said Jenny, "I see Mr. Dacres at the garden-gate; do Robin let him in."

"Oh, he's there, is he?" said Sarah, tossing her head, with an odd smile twitching her lips.

"And Sarah, you are grown so—so handsome," said Jenny, her eyes reading Paris at its best in the elegant morning dress draped about Miss Sarah's angular form.

"You'd better let him in, Robin," observed Miss Sarah, without noticing Jenny's remark. "He is not obstinate, at least so he says—only persistent, and if he means to find me, find me he will."

"But Sarah!" from Jenny.

"We were married soon after I left you," said Sarah. "He followed me, though I left no word as to my destination. We met again at Florence—and made it up—you know we quarrelled quarter of a century ago. He says I did him injustice, I thought he cared for a pretty girl there; he says he never cared for any one but me. I am bound to believe him, since he is a most obstinate man, he never gives up a point. Oh, there you are, eh! I came round to ask Jenny if she'd come and see why our drawing-room looks like a curiosity shop instead of a living-room. She's got the knack of setting things at ease."

"And I have come," said Mr. Dacres, with his cordial smile, "to ask for a brother and sister's congratulations on what I think I may call the happiest, if the meridian hours of my life."

A HARD MAN'S CHARITY.

"A LADY to see you, sir."

Stay, Randall! A lady, do you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then show her in."

It was half-past four on a gloomy November afternoon, and the gas was already lit in Howard Vyner's private office. Vyner himself sat before a pile of correspondence through which he was patiently wading, but his cold, inscrutable features showed little annoyance at the untimely interruption. The door opened two minutes later, and a lady, plainly dressed in dark, well-fitting garments, entered. She wore no veil, so that Vyner, at his first glance, was able to scrutinise her pale, delicately-formed face. She was young he decided at once, and moreover painfully nervous, nor did his calm interrogative manner conduce to set her more at ease. Not a solitary example of embarrassment provoked by Howard Vyner's presence was the newcomer by any means; he was accustomed to inspire his numerous clerks and dependents with obsequious awe, and therefore regarded the intruder's excitement with little surprise.

"My time is limited," at length he said; "if you wish to speak to me——"

The girl, for she was but little more, raised her dark eyes to his face, and tremulously hazarded her plea.

"You employ a great number of clerks, a few of them lady clerks —at least, I was told so. I have made many inquiries, being in search of daily employment, and wishing very earnestly to obtain some at once. My circumstances are hopelessly bad; but I write a good hand, and have received an excellent education. I believe there are one or two vacancies in your office at the present time, and I thought —I hoped——"

Vyner moved impatiently in his chair. This soft-voiced applicant was evidently not hardened to her task. He had interviewed others on a like errand by scores, dismissing them with the same cool indifference with which he tore in pieces the letters lying now in his waste-paper basket, and experiencing no passing regret at their disappointment. He was a man in the prime of life, his age numbering only forty years, yet few had become so eminently successful within so brief a period. Twenty years before Vyner's lot had been no whit more enviable than that of each hard-worked clerk bending over his desk in an adjoining room; but a man possessed of his indomitable perseverance and brilliant business capacities will some way or other invariably find scope for the display of his exceptional talents; and the influence and substantial aid of wealthy friends had

placed more immediately within his power the attainment of that success to which he had devoted his whole life and intellectual faculties. There were those in Farringham who ventured to sneer at the glowing prosperity of the wealthy manufacturer who had sprung up in their midst, and was making his thousands by hard work and industry. But in the breasts of his poorer brethren contempt gradually gave place to envy. Yet one and all, from the highest to the lowest —from his well-to-do neighbours, who strove to patronise him, down to the meanest subordinate in his employ—secretly and heartily disliked and feared Howard Vyner. In short, he had acquired a bad name in the town. He was a hard man, they said; a man who ground down his dependents and boasted that he had bestowed no copper of his hardly-won wealth on the whining beggars at his gate; a man who scoffed at Christian charity, and bade everyone look to his own hand for relief. Moreover, said the townsfolk, he was a man without a creed or religion; but he was rich, and the world was before him, and Farringham abased itself humbly at his feet, and despised the man while it worshipped his gold.

Vyner regarded the woman before him with faint curiosity. Had she rehearsed her acquirements with the vulgar assurance with which he was only too familiar, or besought his leniency in the repulsive accents of the professional beggar, he would have summarily dismissed her, maybe to abject poverty and want. But, happily for her suit, she did neither. Even her nervousness had partially deserted her, and she was awaiting his answer with an expression of half-hopeful eagerness on her pale face.

"You imagine you could occupy such a post with competency?" Vyner asked, after a pause.

"I am almost sure that I could," she answered; involuntarily clasping her small gloved hands.

"Then you are aware what the requirements are," he continued, still in the same calm, business-like tone; and forthwith, in a few words, enlightened her as to her probable duties.

"And the hours?" queried the girl timidly, "they are long, I believe."

"From nine till six."

"Ah! how late." An expression of intense sorrow flitted over her face that did not escape Vyner's critical eye; but she listened eagerly while he briefly entered into other particulars.

"It is doubtful whether you will be able to accept the post as a permanency," he concluded; "your inexperience being an undeniable drawback, but I think you may as well make the attempt. I employ several other lady clerks, but they are all extremely competent and experienced. However," a trifle less coldly as her face flushed and her eyelids fell, "your success depends entirely upon yourself, Miss——"

"Delorme—Alice Delorme." Then her diffidence vanished. Raising her dark and beautiful eyes to Vyner's own she said earnestly: "I am

very grateful to you, Mr. Vyner. I can never thank you sufficiently for giving me a chance to help myself, but I assure you you have lightened my heart of a heavy burden to-day. Although I am only five-and-twenty, I have passed through a veritable sea of trouble, and I do not mind confessing to you that poverty has to-day stared me in the face. Forgive me; you are busy, and I am claiming your interest without thought."

Alice Delorme's fellow-clerks would have opened their eyes in unqualified amazement had they been listeners to her graceful expressions of gratitude. Howard Vyner himself had difficulty in suppressing the habitual smile of cynicism which invariably greeted effusive or emotional overtures, of which he was but seldom the recipient. He looked once again at the girl's tall, slender figure and thoughtful countenance, attractive by reason of its sweetly sensitive lips and large lustrous eyes. Hers was a good face—he thought involuntarily—almost beautiful too, but with a quiet unassuming beauty that would strike but few observers. She was different in some way from the crowd of poor, commonplace, aspiring applicants whom he sent away with ill-concealed disgust day after day. He liked her face; he was vaguely attracted by her manner, and he felt glad all at once that he had not been brusque and overbearing to her as to all the others. Then, with a half-smile of scornful reproof, Vyner pulled himself together and recollected suddenly who he was, and that the girl confronting him in the glare of the gaslight was already one of his dependents.

"Miss Delorme," he said carelessly, dragging pens and ink forward, "will you give me your address before you go? And I omitted to mention that, owing to press of correspondence, I shall be glad if you will be at the office on Monday morning without fail."

"Certainly," replied Miss Delorme promptly, and quickly drawing off her glove she walked to the desk and wrote down in round, even characters, "Alice Delorme, 21 Queen Street." "I trust you will be satisfied with me," she said with a friendly little smile—a smile that was the prettiest thing Howard Vyner had seen for many a long day A moment later Randall appeared, and Miss Delorme drew on her glove and quickly left the office.

"A new clerk, Randall," said his master briefly. "She begins work on Monday."

Randall had a good look at the "new broom" when Monday arrived, and was not long in deciding that she would give satisfaction. He had no great faith in female clerks himself, this being the sole point on which he and his master disagreed; but being a man of discernment he speedily discovered that Alice Delorme possessed three qualities essential to her work. She was business-like, industrious, and reserved.

Howard Vyner was in the habit of shifting the supervision of his offices from his own shoulders on to those of his head clerk, so that

his presence was rarely required; but upon some pretext or other he found it necessary to look in on his clerks more than once during the days of that first week of Alice Delorme's probation. The first time that he did so Miss Delorme raised her head and granted him the full gaze of her beautiful eyes. They were instantly lowered, however, but not before Vyner had experienced an unaccountable sensation of interest and attraction. The new-comer accomplished her duties satisfactorily, and was apparently sincere in her efforts to please.

This much Randall reported to Mr. Vyner, who listened with an air of careless indifference, and promptly administered a check to his loquacious subordinate. Truth to tell, Vyner rebelled at the satisfactory report. He said to himself that Alice Delorme was too much of a lady to sink to the level of an ordinary office drudge, and the interest that her advent had aroused within him gave place to a feeling of disappointment. Day after day, week after week, he would enter the office, and see the row of heads bent diligently over their accustomed work, but never again did Alice Delorme raise her carefully lowered eyelids; and Vyner—the heartless cynic of the world—chafed at her indifference.

"Randall," he said, one day a few weeks later, "here's an important letter that I wish sent off at once. Just ask Miss Delorme to step in here."

The previous day Miss Delorme had been absent, and Vyner felt ridiculously aggrieved at the incident. He did not attempt to analyse the various sensations of annoyance and restlessness to which he had lately become a victim, or to battle with the disinclination for mental labour which was fast rendering him lackadaisical and slothful. For twenty years and more he had struggled for the success which was now assured to him. To obtain that success he had relentlessly cultivated the sordid desire for wealth to the exclusion of all higher and nobler aims. He had gloried in the knowledge that Farringham envied and condemned him; he had boasted with a thrill of egotistical pride of his unwavering perseverance in business, and his contemptuous disdain for the poor and weak-hearted. He had laughed at the supplicants for alms, and revelled in the luxury and indulgences afforded him by the wealth he had justly earned. He had lived in comfort while the poor were starving around him, with no domestic ties to soften his heart and develop the sterling qualities of his hard and unlovable nature. Success was his goal, and success had been lavishly granted him. And yet, twenty years' fierce grapple with the world, twenty years' frantic pursuit after gold, had left one solitary corner of his heart vulnerable.

The office door opened, and in the strong gaslight Vyner saw the face of Alice Delorme. It was altered—different. Her cheeks pallid with long and exhaustive weeping, her eyes downcast, her whole bearing crushed and humiliated.

"You wanted me," she said, and paused.

"Yes; I wanted you," Vyner repeated coldly. "It is a month or more since you entered my office, Miss Delorme, and I believe you have overcome any early difficulty in your duties. Do you still wish to continue them, or is the work too onerous for you?"

"I do not dislike it," she answered passively.

"You probably find the long hours a strain on your health. You are looking ill," hazarded Vyner more solicitously.

"I am quite well."

"Then you have no wish to resign the post?"

"None whatever." She raised her eyes for the first time, struggling with a passing emotion. "I was unavoidably detained at home yesterday," she said apologetically, "otherwise I should not have neglected to come. Thank you. I am glad to find that you consider my work satisfactory."

"I fear you are in some trouble," Vyner observed kindly, dropping for the moment his tone of reserve, and regarding her critically, "or else sadly out of health. Perhaps—pardon the question—a trouble you before alluded to is before you again."

"I am not rich," said the girl with a bitter attempt at a laugh. "There is plenty of poverty around, and I am certainly not exempt."

"You must take care of yourself," said Vyner, still with that novel air of solicitude which sat so strangely upon him. "I fear your friends at home do not properly consider you. You were evidently not intended for one of the workers of this world."

"I have no friends," Alice Delorme cried passionately—"I have no friend in all the world, Mr. Vyner, and I must work or starve. An enviable fate," she added with weary bitterness.

Suddenly across Vyner's brain flashed the remembrance of his brilliant successful manhood, with its one aim and desire for gain, and its present fulfilment. He looked at Alice Delorme, and for one brief instant he allowed the latent goodness of his nature to overcome the pride and reserve.

"It is hard for you; terribly hard," he said, with rough kindness. "I have heard many tales of destitution and woe that have only provoked from me scorn and derision; but your case differs from the rest. You are a lady, and friendless. Believe me, I am sorry for you."

"I have been unlucky all along," she replied sorrowfully. Her eyes, with so much unconscious beauty and sadness in them, touched a tender chord in her employer's heart. No man is all granite, although some would fain believe themselves to be so. Vyner had had no time in his eventful career for love affairs, and was ever too proud for flirtations; he had lived out his life apart from women and their refining influences, and had known none intimately. With the swiftness of lightning, he suddenly realised that Alice Delorme was both beautiful and fascinating, and the knowledge afforded him unqualified pleasure. But, although he was ignorant of it, the fact that she was sorrowful and desolate, even more than any attraction of person, had aroused his

compassion and kindly interest. Rising abruptly, he held out his hand with a frank, winning smile.

"Miss Delorme, will you accept my sympathy? And now I will not detain you any longer, or neglect my correspondence. This is Tuesday. You will oblige me very much by taking a complete rest until next week, when I shall hope to see you return looking more fit for work."

"Oh, thank you—thank you!" cried the girl, with excessive gratitude. Her dark eyes were swimming in tears as she spoke, her hand trembled uncontrollably in Howard Vyner's friendly clasp. Then she turned away, and Vyner resumed his writing.

* * * * * *

Under a solitary street lamp one January night, Howard Vyner stands waiting with exemplary patience. He has stood here fully eleven minutes, yet betrays neither eagerness nor annoyance, being perfectly assured of ultimate success. And success does reward him at length, for down the gloomy little street comes a girl's form, clad in a long, tight-fitting ulster.

"Miss Delorme," says Vyner courteously, as he advances to meet her, "I am lucky to-night; I was wishing particularly to see you."

Miss Delorme inclines her head and smiles rather nervously. She does not ask him why he prefers loitering about the cold streets in hopes of seeing her to requesting an interview in his comfortable office; possibly she does not require enlightening upon the subject. At any rate she exhibits no symptom of surprise at sight of him, nor a particle of embarrassment now that his greeting is over. Two months' sojourn in Farringham has assured Miss Delorme that had she no friends before her advent, she may count upon one now in the person of her employer. And yet they seldom meet, only sometimes like this on her way home from business, when she answers his questions with perfect friendliness and composure, and grows to appreciate, as perhaps none of his acquaintances have ever appreciated before, Howard Vyner's innate goodness and chivalry of heart beneath his brusque and cynical exterior. Other thoughts regarding this sudden whim of his for her society have frequently troubled Alice Delorme, and rendered her manner oftentimes cold and uncertain; but, as she is wont to say to herself in extenuation, with a kind of reckless philosophy, when this vague dread presses heavily upon her, she must not quarrel with her bread and butter, and at this present moment her bread and butter is walking beside her on the pavement.

"Terribly cold to-night, isn't it?" he says. "I hope you are well wrapped up, Miss Delorme. How absurd it seems for a delicate girl like you to be earning your bread and living all alone in this independent fashion."

So saying, Vyner bends his head to look at her tired white face with eyes that are neither calm nor expressionless. Miss Delorme laughs.

"I should hate to live alone," she says absently. "Neither Edwin nor I are cut out for a solitary life."

"And who is Edwin?" queries Vyner quickly; and at his question the girl grows swiftly confused, and a wave of colour sweeps over her face. "I thought you did live alone," pursues her companion coldly. "I understood you to be absolutely without friends or relatives, and pitied you accordingly."

"Pity me now," says Miss Delorme, with a dash of sadness in her quiet tones, "and please do not withdraw the friendship which I value so highly. Mr. Vyner, I have told you before, and I tell you again to-night, that it is against my wish that you trouble to meet me and escort me home, that I am quite content to remain your clerk, while giving you my gratitude, respect and friendship for the consideration you have always shown me. You say in return that you may please yourself. Well, decidedly. And yet I would rather, far rather, that for the future you ignored my obscure existence. Mr. Vyner, you must pardon me if I have given you offence. I have not deceived you voluntarily. I have more cares and worries than I could possibly confess, and, as you ask me who Edwin is, I may tell you this much —that he is one whom the world condemns and wastes no pity upon, a man hiding from the law's punishment, and whose whole bitter life is paying the penalty of a youthful sin."

Vyner stops abruptly in the dimly lighted street, and draws firmly and tenderly into his one of Alice Delorme's gloved hands. He is, as a rule, so cool, so self-contained, that emotion rarely troubles him or carries him out of himself; but just in this moment a nameless something in the girl's face and thrilling tones plants a torturing dread in Vyner's heart, and opens his eyes to one important self-consuming conviction. He clasps her hand in his; he gazes spell-bound into the dark troubled eyes.

"Poor Edwin!" continues Miss Delorme wistfully. "He is a sad, almost hopeless invalid, and entirely dependent upon the money that I earn. It is gall and wormwood to his proud spirit to accept the little comforts I can offer him, and little indeed they are to one suffering from the wearing disease which has made Edwin old before his time, and robbed him of all hope—all youth—all happiness. And yet," her face, suffused with tears and emotion, is upturned to the stern one above her, "and yet, poor struggling outcasts as we were, you helped us; you gave me food and lodging and a restful heart that day when I came in fear and trembling to your office. You were a hard man, they said, but you were not hard to me, and I say 'God bless you,' Mr. Vyner, for your kindness to me that day."

They walk on in silence down gloomy Queen Street. A question is trembling on Vyner's tongue; his brain grows dizzy with the overwhelming fears that possess him, but Alice walks on at his side, and there are no outward signs of agitation visible on her sweet face to tell of the madly beating heart within.

"Sometimes," she says abruptly, "sometimes I think that Edwin will die. In spite of all my care—in spite of all the little comforts—the fear haunts me every day and every night. He has grown so painfully frail and weak, and lung disease nearly always kills in the end."

They have reached No. 21 before Vyner replies.

"Miss Delorme," he says earnestly, "you need have no fears that I shall betray your trust. I want to be your friend still, and you must let me take advantage of my friendship and try to brighten the monotony of your life if it lies in my power to do so. Remember I am rich—very rich—and I have earned the reputation of being hard and grasping and uncharitable. I have scoffed at poverty, and hugged my gold to my bosom. Will you let me give my poor soul a chance, Miss Delorme? Will you forgive my trespassing on a delicate subject like this, and if I take it into my head to send a little offering occasionally to an invalid, will you pocket your pride and accept it—only a few flowers, or a little fruit, or any small dainty? Perhaps in the next world it may be accounted to me for good. Will you?"

He is unprepared for her rapid effusive expressions of gratitude, and man-like, feels ashamed and vastly uncomfortable. Long years of affluence and ease have dulled Vyner's perceptions with regard to poverty and privation; but Alice Delorme, in these days of wearing anxiety and terrible distress, forgets to summon pride to her aid, and thinks only of the welcome relief of which she has stood in such sore need. She has murmured her thanks, and Vyner has released her hand. In another moment she will have vanished. Her hand is on the door.

"Miss Delorme," says Vyner's rapid, almost imploring tones, as his eyes search hers with a swift passionate fire in their depths, "you forget—you have not yet given me permission to visit you and—your brother."

Alice smiles, and his fears depart.

"Ah, no!" she says sadly. "Edwin will see no one. I am sorry I must deny you this. Good-night. I can never thank you enough."

Howard Vyner walks briskly homewards to the large tastefully-furnished house, where he spends a few hours every day surrounded with luxury and ease. And all the time he reflects, half gladly, half regretfully, that although wealth has been his for nearly fifteen years, he has failed to appreciate its value until to-night.

* * * * * *

Her note is in his hand—the cold, business-like note, sent after two days' absence.

"Dear Mr. Vyner,

"I cannot hope to express in words the gratitude which I feel for your numerous kindnesses and presents to my poor invalid. Indeed, we both thank you very heartily, and the pleasant knowledge must be yours that you have cheered many a weary hour. It is with

regret that I ask you to release me from my duties, as I am unable any longer to leave home, and trust that you will quickly fill my vacant post, and pardon any inconvenience my absence may have caused you. "Sincerely yours,

"ALICE DELORME."

Randall had reason for wonderment that morning, when he entered Mr. Vyner's private room for the third time, to find the occupant sitting, pen in hand, at his desk, but with eyes vacantly fixed on some imaginary object outside the window. But Randall would have marvelled still more had he witnessed the ludicrous haste with which his dignified master put on his hat and accomplished the distance that intervened between the office and Queen Street.

Vyner rang the bell and asked imperiously for Miss Delorme; but, once ushered into the small, barely-furnished sitting-room, and Miss Delorme's light step heard in the passage, Vyner's equanimity all at once forsook him, and he looked helplessly around for means of escape. What would she think of him, thus ignoring her express wishes, and intruding on her sorrow and loneliness?

But one glance at Miss Delorme's face reassured him; her eyes were bright with a feverish sadness that went to his heart, and her cheeks pale from exhaustion and watching. She was wearing a crimson blouse of some soft woollen material, and her luxuriant masses of bright brown hair were loose, and carelessly arranged.

All this Vyner's critical eye mastered at a glance; but he saw also that the sad eyes flashed a grateful smile of welcome, and that the red lips quivered unmistakably as she felt his hand close over hers. In this moment Alice was beautiful, and Vyner, susceptible as any love-sick youth to her charms of face and figure, drew nearer, allowing his eyes to express the sympathy and tenderness which, as yet, he was incapable of uttering.

Alice looked up, her eyes brimming over with tears. "He is dying," she said, "dying—and I can do nothing." In a few moments she became calmer. "Poor Edwin," she sighed, "Fate is so hard upon us, and yet even now if she would relent he has still one little chance. Dr. Perrins is not hopeless, by any means. He says that it is England which is killing him—cold, foggy, dismal England, and that I should have taken him away long before the winter months came on. His orders are most peremptory, and they have broken my heart. Edwin is to go to the South of France at once while the weather is mild, and directly he rallies sufficiently to travel. If he does not go—oh, it is cruel, cruel to tell me so—he will die!"

"And if he goes?" says Vyner eagerly.

"He will live for years."

"Then, Miss Delorme, you have no choice but to obey."

"I," she cries passionately, "I—who haven't a friend in the world, or a sixpence to call my own beyond the salary you pay me? I—

who prayed months ago for his death, that he might be spared a lingering illness embittered by slow starvation? Oh, what a fate is ours—what a fate! I have no one to turn to, no one to help me."

"Nay," Vyner says with a wonderful tenderness, a wonderful compassion. Love sweetens his tone, illumines his face, and lends to his manner almost a woman's gentleness as he clasps the girl's hands within his own and draws her nearer, nearer, until her lips are close to his. "Dear, you have me always; and I will do this and more, because—I love you."

Alice's face flushed into new loveliness, and then swiftly paled. She tore away her hands in a tempest of excited grief and despair. "You would do this—for Edwin?" she breathed, looking up at him.

"No—for you."

"Because you love me?"

"Because I am going to win you for my wife!"

"Oh, go away," she wailed—"go away! This is killing me. It can never be—never!"

"And why not?" questioned Vyner harshly.

Alice Delorme moved noiselessly across the room, and opened a door which led into an adjoining apartment temporarily fitted up as a bedroom. Turning, she motioned Vyner to her side, and he saw with compassionate interest a figure lying on a bed in the centre of the room—the figure of a young man of about seven-and-twenty, painfully drawn and emaciated. He had just now fallen into a peaceful slumber. Short golden curls lay upon the pillow—a blonde moustache partially concealed the weak, boyish mouth; but the delicate features and hectic colouring touched Vyner's heart with an indescribable pathos. This boy, this Edwin, was all that she had, and she loved him!

Alice closed the door, and began to speak rapidly.

"He looks so young and boyish still," she said sorrowfully, "that you would hardly believe that five years ago he was mixed up with a London forgery case, and we were obliged to leave England secretly, and take refuge for a long time in America. Our life has been one long torture—one unceasing bitterness. Three years ago Edwin's health failed, and since then I have been compelled to work for both, nursing him in my spare hours, and enduring agonies of fear all the time that he was left alone. And then, poor boy, he began to long for England and home again, and we agreed to seek out some secluded spot where I might obtain daily employment, and where we might be secure from all prying eyes. So we came here to Farringham, and you know all the rest—how you helped me and gave me work. And now it is all over!"

She buried her face in her hands, and sobbed long and bitterly. Vyner stood by in silence. Presently Alice raised her head and looked up at him, her eyes drowned in tears.

"He is my husband," she said, with a kind of reckless despair.

"I deceived you a few weeks ago—that night when you volunteered to help us, and allowed Edwin to pass, as you suggested, for my brother. We had always done so abroad, and he had adopted my name to avoid detection, and I thought it would be less difficult to get employment if I were an unmarried woman. And then, Edwin was fading before my eyes, and you were rich—oh, so rich!—and you offered to help me in the noble generosity of your heart. I was wicked, and cruel, and heartless, and I think you will hate me always; but I knew——"

"You knew that I loved you," broke in Vyner bitterly.

"Yes; I knew that night. I could not help it. But I resolved to leave you in ignorance. How could I have sent you away?"

She hid her face again, and Vyner stood at the window, looking out. It was raining outside, and a little child was sobbing loudly in the street. Vyner wondered, in a dull, vague fashion, how long his heart would ache as it ached just then; how long, during the years to come, he would see this woman's face, all pale and tear-stained, and how long the bitter overwhelming knowledge would haunt him day and night; that success, and wealth, and precedence were as dross compared with the love that dwelt in his heart for Alice Delorme.

Suddenly Alice raised her eyes, and they met his, and a dull, red flush crept up to Vyner's brow. He thought once it would be a just punishment for her deceit if he asked her with brutal candour, "Alice, do you love me?" He could read her like a book, he said to himself, just as he had read her past sad history, her mistaken marriage, her blighted hopes, and lasting regret. She had wronged him—Vyner—who loved her truly. She had given him something to remember and regret all the remainder of his life, and now she had dried her eyes and was looking across at him.

"Why don't you go?" she said.

"I am going," Vyner answered promptly; "but, before I leave, I want to tell you that you may make yourself perfectly happy about—your husband. Didn't I tell you, that night, that my soul was very black? Perhaps one white spot upon it may turn out its ultimate salvation. No—no thanks. Give me your hand once—just once. I will make every necessary arrangement for you, and you must start immediately that Dr. Perrins gives you permission; but I shall not see you again, as I am exceedingly busy just now. Child—for you are a very child still—don't be downcast. Let me wish you and yours renewed health and happiness. That's right. Smile! I like to see your eyes merry. And now—good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

What do her eyes mean? If he looked again he might read them; but he will not. As he reaches the door her last unsteady words fall upon his ear—

"Some day Edwin and I will come home again—and bless you!"

* * * * * *

Two years later, one afternoon in spring, Randall ushers a lady into his master's private office. The lady is handsomely dressed in dark furs, and presents a beautiful and charming appearance. Howard Vyner rises at her entrance, and shakes hands with her coolly enough; but he listens with an air of attentive interest to the brief story she tells him—the story of a lingering death in the sunny South, and a small fortune which has fallen to the widow's share too late to brighten the little home.

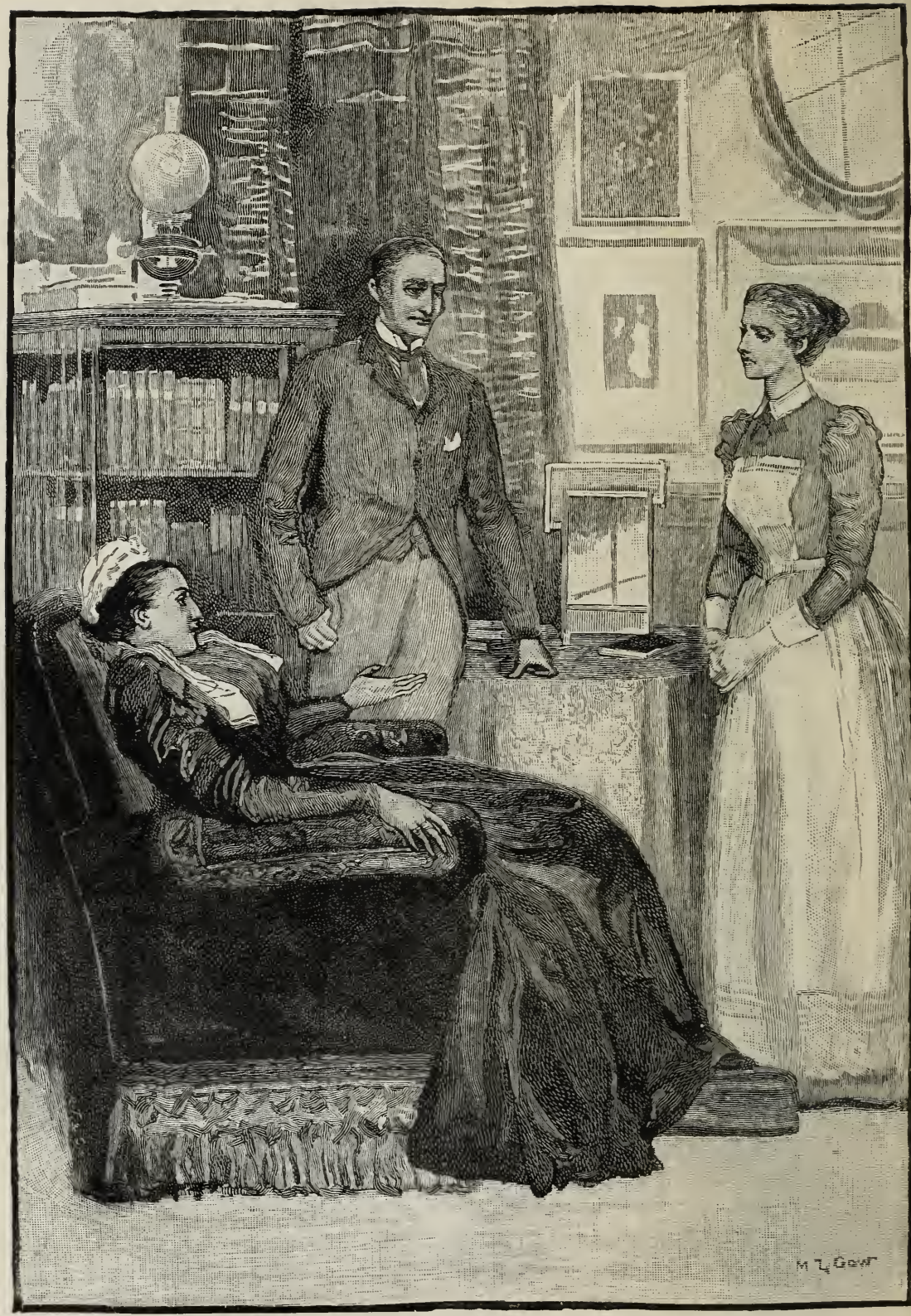
"You gave us six months' happiness," says Alice Delorme sweetly, "six months of real happiness. Edwin said so, and he wanted you to know. But his case was too hopeless a one for cure, and Dr. Perrins was mistaken in his opinion. I came down to Farringham to-day, Mr. Vyner, to thank you, and return to you as far as lies in my power the kindly help you gave me in my trouble. You are very well, I hope," she adds, smiling, standing up and preparing to take her departure.

"Very well, and very busy," returns Vyner absently. And then, abruptly, his manner changes; the fire that died out of his eyes long ago in the little sitting-room in Queen Street, springs into life again beneath the radiance of Alice's smile. Her hand, given in farewell, lies clasped in his. "Alice," he says, with one steady look into her face, "I have clerks enough and to spare, but I am sadly in want of a wife. Farringham has given me up in righteous despair, and I am reported to be fast going down hill. Do you think you will take compassion on me?"

Poor Randall, knocking at the door five minutes later, and receiving no answer, advances boldly into the room, and is alarmed into a precipitous and most undignified exit.

"Trust a woman for mischief," says the dried-up old misanthrope sagely.

L. Jackson.



THE BELL WAS RUNG, AND ESTHER HERSELF ANSWERED IT.

THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST, 1892.

A GUILTY SILENCE.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE STOLEN CASKET.

NEXT evening's post brought Margaret the following letter:—

"HONOURED MISS DAVENANT,—This is to inform you that your par has met with a accedent through treading on a peace of oringe peel and has been lade up these two days rather worse this morning but not dangerous still should feel more comfortable if you was here to see him i write this unbeknown to the old gentleman trusting you will excuse the liberty from yours trooly, "M. E. RIX."

The morning train for Wellingford was gone before Margaret received the letter. The next train was not till afternoon, and by that she went. Mrs. Rix's note would have reached her on the previous morning, had not the slatternly young person to whom it was intrusted by the writer kept it in her pocket for twenty-four hours before posting it. But of this Margaret was unaware, the letter being without date of any kind, otherwise she would probably have been even more disquieted in mind than she was. The forty hours that had elapsed since the writing of the note had been sufficient to cause a marked improvement in the condition of Mr. Davenant. At first, he had really been much shaken by his fall, and confinement to bed had induced a low and melancholy frame of mind; and when, one morning he began to talk in a lugubrious voice about his "latter end," Mrs. Rix at once took alarm, the result being the elegant piece of composition given above.

For Ferdinand Davenant to be laid on a sick bed, even for one day, was a novel but by no means a pleasant experience. It was almost incomprehensible to the old *flâneur* to find himself thus cut off at a moment's notice from that outer world, in whose daily sayings and doings he took such intense delight. The old out-door, bustling, meretricious life had slipped away from him like a cuticle for which

he had no longer any use; and he shivered as he looked around, everything felt so changed and cold. During the weary hours he lay in bed, unable to move without pain, his thoughts would now and then persist in coming home to roost, when he would fain have kept them still on the wing. They would keep on whispering disagreeable questions in his ear—questions which he found it impossible to answer. Ever since he was first launched on the world, it had been his endeavour to make his life as much like one long *jour de fête* as possible; and now (these same tormenting thoughts kept on asking him) out of all the years that he had thrown so recklessly into the crucible of pleasure, what residuum of pure gold remained to him? Absolutely not a single grain; and already he was an old man. Already! why it seemed only yesterday since he touched his majority and twenty thousand pounds with it! No wonder the old worldling grew melancholy, and began to quaver about his "latter end."

Happily, however he took a turn for the better a few hours after the writing of Mrs. Rix's note, and from that time his improvement was rapid, although his ankle still remained so swollen and painful that he was unable to leave his bed. By the time Margaret reached Wellingford he had almost recovered his usual spirits.

Margaret stooped over the bed and kissed her father; then she put her arms round his neck, and laid his head on her bosom, and kissed him again.

"It makes me very, very happy, dear, to find that you are getting better!" she murmured.

"Madge! Madge! don't talk like that!" he exclaimed. "Heaven is kinder to me than my deserts, to have blessed me with such a child!"

Then he cried for a little while, quietly and without noise; but Margaret soon succeeded in comforting him, and at the end of half an hour he was his old cheerful buoyant self again, without a care for the future, or a thought that reached to the morrow.

Next day Mr. Davenant was still better, and was able to get up and limp as far as the sofa in the next room. Margaret fetched out his violin and asked him to play. After that, she sang to him, and then read to him. Still later in the day, she got out the chessmen, and after teasing Mr. Davenant for an hour and a half, she allowed herself to be ignominiously beaten. Then, while Margaret was there, there came a long letter from Trix, dated from some hotel on the Rhine, which had to be read over aloud three times, and commented on I know not how often, before Mr. Davenant would allow it to be put away. But Margaret said no word to her father touching her own engagement; for which reticence we may credit her with certain reasons of her own.

Her father improved so rapidly that Margaret decided to return home by the early train on the second morning after her arrival at Wellingford. This train reached Helsingham at eight o'clock, so that

she would just be in time to commence her morning duties in the school. Before leaving her father, she did not forget to nearly empty her purse, and when she reached the station at Helsingham she found that she had not sufficient money left to pay for a cab home. She smiled to herself, and thought what a different fortune would be hers a few weeks hence, when, as Mrs. Robert Bruhn, of Brook Lodge, she should have a carriage and servants of her own to wait upon her. Everything would be changed as by the touch of an enchanter's wand. The fortunate prince had come at last, whose kiss would change her from a shabby-genteel Cinderella into a glittering princess, with whom Poverty would never more dare to claim acquaintance.

These were pleasant thoughts to accompany her during her walk home on that brisk, cheery, autumn morning. No sooner had she reached Irongate House than she saw that something unusual had happened. On her way to her own room she met Esther Sarel.

"What is the matter, Esther?" she said.

"Last night, ma'am, the house was broken into by thieves, and Miss Easterbrook is terribly put about."

A slight smile pursed up the corners of Margaret's mouth. "What can there possibly be in Irongate House worth the carrying away?"

"Miss Easterbrook has had a small bag of money taken out of her desk. And the silver spoons are gone, and one or two of the young ladies' best dresses, and a few other things. But, as far as I can make out, there is only one thing gone belonging to you."

"And that is—?"

"The little ebony casket from off your dressing-table."

Margaret's very soul seemed to freeze with terror. She turned on Esther with a face as white as that of a dead woman. "What did you say?" she whispered hoarsely.

"The casket, ma'am, from off your dressing-table, is one of the things stolen."

"Great heavens! what will become of me?"

In the stolen casket was hidden away the stolen letter.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MR. DAWKINS'S MORNING CALL.

Miss Davenant did not faint; she did not even sink into a chair. She seemed to turn rigid where she stood, as though she had been touched by some magician's wand, and changed suddenly into stone, leaving nothing of her alive save her wild, beautiful, terror-stricken eyes.

"Oh, miss, what has happened?" cried Esther Sarel, whose face had caught a reflection of the anguish and terror which contracted that of Margaret.

Miss Davenant did not answer; she did not even seem to be aware of Esther's presence. Fixed and motionless as a marble statue, she stood, like Belshazzar, appalled at the vision before her. But, in her case, no Daniel was needed to interpret the letters of flame which were burning themselves so deeply into her brain. Only four letters, making up one little word, easy for any one to read. *Ruin!* One little word, written again and again, till all space seemed to burn with it. One little word syllabled again and again till all space seemed to echo it. Ruin—everywhere Ruin.

Esther began to weep. Going up to Margaret, and touching her lightly on the arm, she said tearfully—"Oh, miss, do please tell me what has happened."

The touch, light as it was, broke the spell that rested on Margaret. The rigidity of her features seemed to melt away; a consciousness of time and place, and of the familiar things before her, began to dawn in her eyes. With a faint sweet smile she turned on Esther, and patting her softly on the cheek, said, "Simple child. Why do you cry? There is no need for tears."

Then, seating herself on the sofa, she drew Esther to her side, and let her head rest on the girl's shoulder. In that first bitter hour of her trouble, Margaret's pride was utterly vanquished. She let her head rest thus for several minutes; then, with a heart-weary sigh, she took hold of Esther's hand, and said, "All this must seem very strange to you, Esther. But I cannot explain it, so you must not ask me to do so; neither must you ever say a word about it to any one. On that score I have implicit faith in you." Then, after another space of silence, she added, "Now that I am better, you must give me all the particulars of this strange affair. Have the—have any of the thieves been captured?"

"No, miss, not so far as I know," answered Esther. "They broke in through the back laundry window, and nobody knew anything about it till cook got up this morning, and found that the silver spoons had been taken. Miss Easterbrook sent me down to the police-station, and one constable has been here already; but Mr. Dawkins, the superintendent, has promised to come up in a little while. Miss Easterbrook had a fit of hysterics when the news was told her, and she has been so ill ever since that she has been obliged to go to bed; and everything in the house seems to be going wrong."

"Then it is time for me to bestir myself," said Margaret. "Leave me now, Esther. I will just change my dress, and then go and see Miss Easterbrook. Be silent, and discreet."

As soon as Esther was gone, Margaret hastened to satisfy herself with her own eyes that the casket was really stolen. Yes—it was no longer there; neither it nor a shawl-brooch, a silver arrow, which she remembered to have laid on the top of the casket a few minutes before setting out for the station on her way to Wellingford.

Whither, now, had vanished all those pleasant dreams with which she had beguiled her way back from the station only one short half-hour ago? Air-drawn pictures, traced by the fingers of the Fiend, to lure her with a beauty that made more bitter the bitterness of her present cup: such to her they now seemed. Mrs. Robert Bruhn, of Brook Lodge, indeed! Say, rather, a convict with cropped hair, picking oakum in a whitewashed cell. Such was certainly the fate in store for her, should the stolen casket by any mischance fall into the hands of the police. Instead of houses, and carriages, and servants, and a husband's protecting love,—the police-van, the prison, and stern-faced women with bunches of heavy keys. Then, more terrible than all, there would be the trial in open court—a trial for felony, under the scorching gaze of a thousand eager, inquisitive, pitying, scornful eyes. Why, the very shame of such a thing would kill her father, would taint the name of her sister, and would make her memory a curse to the man who had asked her to become his wife! On one point, however, she could afford to felicitate herself: that her engagement to Mr. Bruhn was a fact of which, as yet, the world was in entire ignorance; and in entire ignorance it must remain, at all events, for the present.

With a preternatural calmness that seemed to have in it a touch of something that was akin to the calmness of a sleep-walker, she made her toilet, and then went in search of Miss Easterbrook. The clear olive of her cheeks had paled to an almost marble whiteness. The delicate aquiline features were set and passionless; only the thin mobile under-lip quivered now and again almost imperceptibly, and her slender restless fingers were never still.

No sooner did poor Miss Easterbrook set eyes on Margaret than she opened out with a voluble account of the preceding night's robbery, interspersing the narrative with a statement of what her feelings would have been had she known that thieves were in the house, and what her feelings were when she heard that thieves had been in the house, and ended the whole with an hysterical burst of tears. Margaret soothed her in some measure, and promised to see Mr. Dawkins when he should arrive, and agreed to take the reins of power entirely into her own hands till such time as Miss Easterbrook should be sufficiently recovered to resume her functions. Then, with a kiss, she left her, and proceeded into the class-rooms, where a quarter of an hour's quiet supervision succeeded in restoring the fluttered dovecote to something like order. Scarcely was this accomplished, when Esther Sarel came in with Mr. Dawkins's card, and informed Margaret that that gentleman and one of his men were waiting to see her.

Three minutes later, Mr. Dawkins and his faithful satellite, Sergeant Stuffer, were ushered into Miss Davenant's sitting-room. Margaret was sitting in front of her easel, and with her back to the door, as the two strangers came in, contemplating, with her head a little on one

side, and her brush poised in her hand, a certain cloud-effect which she had just been working into her landscape. She let them stand for a moment or two, after they had advanced into the room, before she deliberately laid down her brush, and slowly wheeling her chair, confronted them with her pale, haughty face.

"You have called about this little affair of the burglary, I suppose, Mr.—a—a—Mr. Superintendent Dawkins?" said Margaret in her clear, icy tones, daintily lifting the cardboard for a moment between her thumb and finger, and glancing carelessly at it, as though to make sure of the name. "Pray be seated,"—this in her grandest manner.

Even the usually imperturbable Mr. Dawkins seemed slightly taken aback by a reception so entirely different from what he had expected. Could it be possible that this flashing, glorious creature—a little *passée*, perhaps, but none the worse for that in the eyes of Mr. Dawkins, who was himself a widower of some years' standing,—was nothing more than a teacher at Irongate House? "Yes, I have called about the little affair of the burglary," said Mr. Dawkins quietly, as he took the proffered seat.

"Miss Easterbrook herself being too unwell to receive you, she has requested me to act as her deputy in this matter," said Margaret. "I presume that your first duty will be to make an examination of the premises; after which you will require to see such of the domestics as may be able to throw any light on the matter. Am I correct in my assumptions?"

"No one could be more so—as far as you go, madam," said Mr. Dawkins drily, who did not relish having his work laid out for him, ready cut and dried, by another. "But, in addition to what you have stated, I shall require a list of the missing property, together with a full and accurate description of each article. I presume there will be no difficulty about obtaining such a list?"

"No difficulty whatever. Why should there be?" said Margaret. "As yet, I suppose, you have no—no, what shall I call it?—clue to the perpetrators of the offence?"

"Well—hum—you see it might be rather premature to say either that we have or that we have not," said Mr. Dawkins, putting on his professional mask in a moment.

"Just so. You have a natural dislike to commit yourself one way or the other," said Margaret coolly. "I have always understood, though I know nothing personally of such matters, that the more oracular and mysterious the gentlemen of your profession become, the less they really know about the affair in hand. Let us hope that the rule does not hold good in the present case."

Mr. Dawkins laughed a feeble laugh, and wiped his hot forehead with his yellow bandana. "The coolness of that lady is something tremendous," said the superintendent to himself.

"I must now delegate you into the hands of my maid," said Miss

Davenant, "who will conduct you over the premises, and supply you with whatever information you may require." Then she rang the bell.

"Might be a private in the force by the way I'm ordered about," muttered Mr. Dawkins discontentedly to himself.

The bell was answered by Esther Sarel.

"These gentlemen," said Miss Davenant, "are here to gather information respecting the burglary of last night. You will accordingly conduct them over the house, or such portions of it as they may be desirous of seeing, and introduce to them such of the domestics as they may think proper to interrogate." Then, turning to the superintendent, "I shall be glad to see you here, sir, when you shall have finished elsewhere;" and with a stately inclination of her head she dismissed them, and turned to resume her brush, as though there were no such persons in existence.

So Miss Davenant was left alone while the three wandered "upstairs and downstairs, and through my lady's chamber," Esther leading the way with such a pretty air of timidity that the gallant Stuffer could not keep his eyes off her. Mr. Dawkins himself marched on in grim silence, keeping his sharp eyes well about him. The laundry window, through which the thief or thieves had effected an entrance, was examined from every possible point of view, and the gravel outside was carefully searched for the marks of strange footsteps. After this there was some further examination indoors; then the cook, who had been the first to make the discovery, and one or two of the other domestics had a few questions put to them; then a detailed list of the missing articles was drawn up; and then Mr. Dawkins declared that nothing more could be done for the present, and that he was ready to see Miss Davenant again.

Margaret, on being left alone, let the brush drop from her fingers, and sank back in the chair with closed eyes, and so sat, as moveless, except for her breathing, as one dead, till the noise of returning footsteps woke her suddenly into vivid life.

"Well, what news?" she said, turning on Mr. Dawkins with a smile as that gentleman entered the room. "You have not found the rascals anywhere in hiding, I suppose? No, of course not. No such good fortune. But have you found any direct clue, may I ask—anything that will serve to point your suspicions towards any person or persons in particular? Now, pray don't put on your grave professional air, and say that, really, you are scarcely prepared at present to offer an opinion either one way or the other. Now, don't do that! Either satisfy the natural inquisitiveness of my sex by answering my questions frankly and fairly, or else tell me plainly that you Won't." Miss Davenant's smile, as she said these words, was enough to coax a secret out of a far sterner man than the susceptible Mr. Dawkins.

"It would be impossible, Miss Davenant, to answer any questions put by you except in the fairest and frankest manner," he said.

'As you say, we have not found the thieves in hiding; we had not the least expectation of doing so. Neither have we found what may be called any direct clue as to who the rascals are, or where they come from. Still, the information I have gathered this morning will, I hope, put me on the right track, and once on it, it will be strange if I lose it again till Justice shall have claimed her own."

Margaret smiled and smelled her salts, but said nothing.

"By-the-bye," resumed Mr. Dawkins, as he drew a long strip of paper from his pocket-book, "I have here a list, drawn up by myself, of the stolen property. One of the missing articles is an ebony casket belonging to you, so your maid informs me. Now, what I want is a more exact description of the casket than your maid was able to furnish me with. I have it put down here as a small oval casket, made of ebony, inlaid with ivory, and having a small silver plate let into the lid, on which were engraved the initials M. D. Is my description sufficiently accurate?"

"A photograph could hardly be more so," answered Margaret. "I can add nothing to it. But, my poor rubbishing old casket that I have had this quarter of a century!—not worth a groat to any one save the owner, and very little to me. You may as well expunge it from your list; it is not worth reclaiming."

"Pardon me," said Mr. Dawkins suavely, "but of all the articles taken, this one seems to me the most likely to be of use in tracking the thieves. You see, it is something out of the common way—an article which any pawnbroker or curiosity dealer would recognise in a moment from a printed description. No, no, I cannot afford to expunge it from my list; the ebony casket is my trump card."

"But cannot you understand, sir," said Margaret, a little impatiently, "that to have my name mixed up in any way with this wretched affair would be a source of great annoyance to me? Suppose the casket were found, and the thieves caught, as far as I understand such matters, it would then become necessary for me to appear in court and identify my property. To me such an ordeal would be most painful and repugnant."

"A mere trifle, my dear madam, and in no way trying to the nerves. I would guarantee that you should not undergo the least annoyance. Then, think of the pleasure of seeing the rascals, or rascal, for I am doubtful whether more than one was concerned in it, convicted!" and Mr. Dawkins chuckled, and rubbed his hands in gleeful anticipation.

"The pleasure in such a case, sir, would be entirely your own," said Margaret, with a flash of scorn. "Am I to understand," she went on, "that you decline to expunge my casket from your list of the stolen property?"

"My trump card! In any other respect, Miss Davenant, I am yours to command; but this is a matter affecting my professional reputation, and it grieves me to be compelled to disoblige a lady.

By-the-bye, I have not yet ascertained from you the contents of the casket. They were——"

"Trifles, too numerous to be specified in detail. Bits of ribbon, two or three odd gloves, a few Roman coins, some needles, and sewing-silks of different colours, a letter or two of no consequence to any one but myself, together with a small heap of miscellaneous rubbish." Margaret ran through the list with a sort of contemptuous indifference. Then rising from her seat, as if to put an end to the interview, she said, "So you decline to oblige me in this trifling matter, Mr. Dawkins?"

"You are really too hard upon me, Miss Davenant," said the superintendent, rising also. "But are we not both tilting at shadows? The thieves are not yet caught, and it is quite possible that they never will be. Even should we succeed in getting them safely under lock and key, it is not unlikely that we shall find that your casket has either been broken up and burnt, or made away with in some other manner; in fact, the probabilities are dead against its ever turning up or being seen by you again. Good heavens, madam, are you ill?"

Margaret's overstrung nerves had given way at last, and the superintendent was barely in time to catch her as she sank to the ground in a dead faint. He rang for assistance, and delivered Miss Davenant into the hands of Esther Sarel. Five minutes later he left Irongate House in company with the faithful Stuffer, who had been regaling himself to his heart's content in the kitchen.

Just outside the gates, Mr. Dawkins came to a dead stop. "What is Miss D.'s little game, I wonder?" he murmured to himself. "There's something more under the surface than can be seen at present. I must get hold of that casket by hook or by crook. Yes, my dark-eyed friend, you have just gone the right way to work to excite the curiosity of J. D.; so much the worse, perhaps, for you. I've caught many a one tripping just as unlikely as Miss Margaret Davenant. What a splendid creature she is, though! Thoroughbred every inch of her, and as full of fire as a racer. Come along, Stuffer. We must strike while the iron's hot."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES.

Two hours after the departure of Mr. Dawkins from Irongate House, Margaret Davenant wrote and sent off the following note:—

"Dear Mr. Bruhn,—I want you to forget for the space of one month all that passed between us a few evenings ago. Not that I wish a single syllable of what was then said to be considered as unsaid—quite the contrary; but I am desirous that during the next four weeks you should hold no communication with me, either directly

or indirectly, that you should regard me for that time as a person who has gone, say, on a voyage of discovery to the moon, and who is utterly out of your reach for the time being. Further, I must earnestly request that whatever *foolish* agreement you and I may have come to on the occasion just named be kept an inviolate secret from every one till you shall hear from me again. Can you grant me all this without seeking to know my reason for asking it, because I can never tell you my reason? I think you can. At all events, I have full faith in you. Four weeks to-day I will write to you again; meanwhile, believe me to be,

"Faithfully and affectionately yours,
"MARGARET DAVENANT.

"P.S.—Send me one line in reply to let me know that I have not asked too much."

The line of reply sent by Mr. Bruhn ran as under:—

"DEAR MARGARET,—You have *not* asked too much. Your wishes shall be obeyed implicitly, and your reasons (I cannot doubt that they are good ones) never be called into question. Four weeks seem a long time, but at the end of them you will find me still, as ever,

"Your loving
"ROBERT BRUHN."

Margaret kissed the scrap of paper passionately, with many sighs and tears; and then, not daring to keep it about her, for she knew not what a moment might bring forth, she burnt it.

She knew not what a moment might bring forth. Day and night the sword of Damocles hung over her head, suspended by a single hair. Every knock startled her, every strange footfall made her flesh creep. Every morning on waking she said to herself, "Perhaps, before the day is over I shall be in prison." And when the day was over and she laid her aching head on her pillow, she murmured, "It is too late for them to fetch me to-night; I am safe till to-morrow."

Never had she been more assiduous in her duties as governess than she was during this time of soul-wearying suspense; never more painstaking, or patient, or gentle, than she was now. But the moment her classes were over she got away to her own room, where she would sit in the dark, silently brooding for hours; or else, when the mood was on her, she would seat herself at the piano and go on playing far into the night, long after the rest of the house were in bed. She could not bear to read, she could not bear to draw; all the ordinary occupations of her leisure hours, except music, were utterly distasteful to her. She was waited on with quiet devotion by Esther Sarel, who was the only person Margaret cared to see inside her room. "She's fretting after her sister, poor thing!" said Miss Easterbrook to herself. "Misses her, of course. But she will soon

get reconciled to the loss; and when Mrs. Randolph gets back from her wedding tour, Miss Davenant will recover her cheerfulness."

"She hardly eats enough to keep body and soul together," said Esther despairingly, one day, when Margaret found it impossible to touch some little dainty which she had concocted expressly for her. "The dark circles under her eyes seem to get bigger every day. At this rate she'll soon be in her grave. Ah! there's something on her mind; I'm sure there is. She's heartsick with some great trouble."

Margaret still kept up her custom of taking a solitary walk every morning before commencing the duties of the day; but now her feet invariably led her along certain high-lying fields, rarely frequented by her before, which overlooked the approaches to Irongate House, so that any person coming in that direction from the town could be plainly discerned while still some distance away. Like Sister Ann looking out from the battlements of Bluebeard's castle for the coming horsemen, Margaret, from the vantage ground of these fields, gazed along the high-road leading from the town, and waited for the coming of the herald of her doom.

But still the herald of her doom delayed his coming. Day lagged wearily after day, night stole stealthily after night, like one assassin in the wake of another; yet still the unnatural calm remained unbroken, still the thunderbolt delayed to strike. Margaret began to breathe again.

When the second Saturday after the burglary came round, she took some comfort to herself from a paragraph in that day's issue of the *Helsingham Gazette*, which stated, with reference to the late affair at Irongate House, that, "up to the present time, the police have not succeeded in tracing any of the stolen property, neither have they obtained any clue to the thieves." This was the first gleam of hope that had visited her since the day of the robbery, and instead of dying out, as she at first feared it would do, it broadened slowly but surely; the dark clouds of despair that had shut her in so firmly, as it seemed, began to roll back on their gloomy hinges, and, like timid buds, all the sweet hopes of her life began to blossom forth anew.

Yes, Margaret began to breathe again. The four weeks fixed upon by her as her time of probation narrowed themselves to three; the three dwindled down to two; the two faded into one; the last of the four was here, and still no word, good, bad, or indifferent, had been spoken by Mr. Dawkins. But the suspense was killing. This silence might bode her no good; it might be merely the hush that precedes the storm; and since the oracle would not come to her, she decided that she must go to the oracle. She went. Mr. Dawkins, busily at work in his private office, received her with affable politeness.

"Both Miss Easterbrook and myself," said Margaret, when the first greetings were over, "are anxious to know whether you have obtained any clue to the thieves who broke into Irongate House."

"I am sorry, Miss Davenant, to have to inform you that, so far,

all my efforts in that direction have proved of no avail," answered the little superintendent. "I have had two or three men up on suspicion of being implicated in the affair, but have been obliged to let them go again for want of any direct criminatory evidence."

"Do you know, Mr. Dawkins," said Margaret with a smile, "that I am rather pleased than otherwise at your want of success? Of course such a confession is shocking to your professional ideas, but I believe Miss Easterbrook is of the same way of thinking as I am. The stolen property was of no great value, and we would, both of us, rather that the thieves should get clear away with it, than that we should have to undergo the annoyance of being obliged to appear as prosecutors in a court of justice."

"Happily, Miss Davenant, we men are not of the same way of thinking in such matters; and you may depend upon one thing, that I shall continue to use my utmost endeavours to capture the rascals who stole your ebony casket."

Despite the superintendent's ominous last words, Margaret walked back to Irongate House with a wonderfully lightened heart. That intolerable feeling of suspense was gone, or all but gone. She determined to scatter her weight of dark care to the winds; to rise up from her sackcloth and ashes; to fling wide the gates of her life, that love and all things bright and gracious might enter therein; and should there perchance be one or two dim ghosts still wandering forlorn in the darkest corners of her heart, she would chain them up, and keep them out of sight, so that no one should suspect their presence but herself.

One by one the last few days of Margaret's month faded into the portion of time gone by till the morning of the last day dawned upon her, bright and full of promise. Its evening was to bring back to her side the man she had learned to love during her month of trouble far more deeply than she thought she could ever have loved again. She was very happy this morning, with a happiness that made her tremble. She was like one who had come out of a cave of horrors into the broad light of day. She was dazzled with the unaccustomed sunshine, and felt as though she were a stranger to herself. She knew that the precipice she had so narrowly escaped was still there—that the ground still trembled under her feet; but she felt comparatively safe now, and she would suffer no further prevision of ill to cloud her mind. She would gather the rosebuds while it was in her power to do so, and bask in the sunshine without a thought of the morrow.

In the afternoon she sent a message to Brook Lodge. For the second time she wrote—

"Come to me.

"Margaret."

An hour later Mr. Bruhn was at Irongate House. Tears of love and joy and gratitude shone in Margaret's eyes, as she held out both

her hands to greet him. But Esther Sarel, who was standing with the open door in her hand, could scarcely believe her eyes when she saw Mr. Bruhn stoop forward and press, unchidden, Miss Davenant's lips with his own.

They sat down side by side on the sofa in Margaret's room. Mr. Bruhn took possession of her hand. "Now that you have come back from your voyage of discovery to the moon," he said, "I hope you will take the veto off my lips, and allow me to inform all and sundry whom it may or may not concern that you are shortly to become my wife."

"Then the four weeks that have passed since I saw you last," said Margaret, "have not sufficed to show you the error of your ways? Are you still as obstinately bent as you were before on having your own way in the matter, and scorning the opinion of the world?"

"My will in this matter is as the laws of the Medes and Persians, and can know no change. Further—I shall not leave this room till the day is fixed upon that will change you from Miss Margaret Davenant into Mrs. Robert Bruhn."

"Tyrant!" sighed Margaret. "You think you can dictate to me now; but wait awhile, sir, and see whether I do not turn the tables on you completely."

"All the more reason why I should be a despot while it is in my power. You will, consequently, bear in mind that the fifteenth of next month will be your wedding day, and will make your preparations accordingly."

"I never had a memory for dates," said smiling Margaret. "My best plan will be to send Miss Easterbrook to you."

So she got up from her seat, and rang the bell; and then coming stealthily behind Mr. Bruhn, she touched him on the forehead with a swift little kiss, and fled through the French windows into the garden.

The astonishment of Miss Easterbrook, when informed that Trix was engaged to Hugh Randolph, was as nothing in comparison with her astonishment at hearing the news Mr. Bruhn had to tell her. Her first act on being told was to have a good cry; but after she had in some measure recovered, Mr. Bruhn and she had a long cosy chat together, and settled everything between them to their mutual satisfaction. Then Mr. Bruhn went in search of Margaret, and captured her in the little summer-house, where she was trying to read 'Hyperion' with but indifferent success.

Margaret wrote to her father by that night's post, informing him of Mr. Bruhn's offer, and her acceptance of it; and not many days were allowed to elapse before Mr. Davenant went in person to congratulate his daughter. Margaret had half an hour's quiet conversation with the old gentleman before she introduced him to Mr. Bruhn. The latter at once contracted a strong liking for Mr. Davenant—despite his follies and failings, nearly everybody liked the old Bohemian,—and he whispered to Margaret that as soon as they

should have returned from their wedding tour, he would find some more lucrative and creditable post for her father than that of second fiddle in the orchestra of the Wellingford theatre; while Margaret, on her side, gave Mr. Bruhn to understand, without telling him so in words, that the more kindly he took to her father, the better he would please her.

A shudder of horror and astonishment ran through the coteries of town and county when the news of Mr. Bruhn's approaching marriage was promulgated abroad. Marry a governess, indeed! A woman no longer young, who came from nobody knew where, and had not a penny to call her own! It was well-nigh incredible. Mr. Bruhn, in years gone by, when he was a widower young and promising, had been shot at by many fair archers; but he had gone on his way with barred visor, unheeding the tiny shafts of his assailants, until at length he had come by common consent to be put in the matrimonial 'Index Expurgatorius,' as a man who would never wed again. But now, after all these years, the weak place in his armour had been discovered; his heel had been touched by the fatal barb; and Achilles lay prone in the dust.

But there was another tremendous question involved in this backsliding of Mr. Bruhn.

Would it be the duty of Society to acknowledge, or to ignore, the new mistress of Brook Lodge? A problem not lightly to be solved; a question not hurriedly to be answered. On the one hand, Mr. Bruhn was too important a personage to be coughed down, or shouldered out of court, as a person of inferior pretensions might have been. He was a man of good family—although a manufacturer—of great wealth, and of unblemished reputation; a man who made his weight felt in twenty different ways, and who was not unlikely, at no distant date, to represent the borough of Helsingham in Parliament. Every way the question was beset with difficulties. "Let us wait," said first one and then another, until in the end a waiting policy was unanimously agreed upon. So Society sat, with coldly-critical eyes, and its primmest pucker on its lips, waiting for the first glimpse of the new mistress of Brook Lodge.

Meantime the preparations for the wedding went merrily forward; and the two people chiefly concerned never troubled themselves in the slightest degree as to what the opinion of Society might be with regard to their vile proceedings. During those few brief sunny weeks of courtship they seemed, both of them, to have thrown off twenty years from their lives, and were like two children playing at making love. Our darling Trix, who had got back from her wedding tour by this time, vowed that she had quite a maternal feeling for that giddy moth of a Margaret; and she told the gay young spark who came courting to Irongate House that it would look much better of him to wear his hair *au naturel*, instead of trying to revive the exploded practice of dredging it with powder. This was a hit at Mr. Bruhn's grizzled

locks as offering such a marked contrast to the glad boyishness of his disposition just then.

The wedding-day came at last, as all days, whether fair or foul, will come in their turn. Never before, in the memory of any one there, had the old parish church held such a crush of fair and fashionably-dressed ladies. Mr. Davenant, in a new and lustrous suit of clothes obtained specially for the occasion, was affected to tears when he looked round and thought that it was his daughter whom all this fair bevy had come to criticise and peck at. Miss Easterbrook, whose water-works were always ready on the slightest provocation, was tearful from different causes. Trix was lovely, and commanded much attention. The bride herself looked very pale and very haughty, but magnificently beautiful in her dress of white moiré antique. She knew that five hundred not very friendly eyes were coldly dissecting her very look and movement, and she bore herself accordingly; but there was a veiled tenderness in her eyes, and a trembling ring in her voice, which showed those who stood around her how deeply she was affected. As for the bridegroom, we all know that on such occasions he is regarded with a sort of contemptuous indifference, as though he were merely a banner-carrier in the procession—a supernumerary, indispensable, indeed, to the due carrying out of the programme, but rather a nuisance than otherwise from every other point of view; and, in the present case, there is no need to run counter to the popular opinion.

Fancy the wedding-breakfast happily over; fancy the parting speeches all spoken; fancy bride and bridegroom fairly on their way to the continent; and then let us bid them farewell for a little time, and come back to the consideration of some other points connected with this history.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ESTHER'S CONFESSION.

THE burglary at Irongate House was coming to be looked upon by Mr. Dawkins and his merry men in blue as one of the unravelled mysteries of their profession. All their efforts to discover the thieves had proved of no avail; and as time went on, bringing with it fresh interests of various kinds, each demanding immediate attention, the Irongate House affair was gradually elbowed on one side, and seemed in danger of falling utterly into the background. It was, however, suddenly dragged into prominence again by the unexpected finding of Miss Davenant's ebony casket, which was brought to the police-station on the very morning of Margaret's marriage by a labouring man, who had found it hidden away under a quantity of cattle-fodder in his master's stackyard, where it had doubtless been put by the thieves, as an object of small value, the retention of which was more likely to lead to their detection than any other article which they had

stolen. The man who found the casket, having read one of the handbills put out by the police at the time of the robbery, at once recognised his treasure-trove for what it really was, and became desirous of ridding himself of it as quickly as possible.

As it happened, Mr. Dawkins had been called from home that morning, and it was after mid-day when he took his seat in his private office, and had the ebony casket placed in his hands by Sergeant Stuffer.

Mr. Dawkins listened attentively to the recital of his faithful subordinate, respecting the finding of the casket, and then sat for some minutes in silence. Not the least among the many surprises connected with his career as police superintendent, was that of finding the magnificent Miss Davenant, of Irongate House, transformed into Mrs. Bruhn, of Brook Lodge. As he sat there with the casket before him, every minute incident of their first interview rose vividly in his memory. Her off-hand, imperious manner when he first introduced himself; her coaxing, siren-like style later on, when she begged of him to expunge that very casket from his list of the stolen property; those wonderful black orbs that thrilled him so strangely when they fixed themselves full upon him; the strange swoon into which she fell, and the half impression upon his own mind as he left the house, that there was something more under the surface of the affair than was just then visible. Nothing was forgotten.

Presently Mr. Dawkins began to turn over and examine the casket more closely than he had hitherto done. It accorded exactly with the description of it given him at Irongate House. It was very old-fashioned, and had a silver plate let into the lid, on which were engraved Miss Davenant's initials. The lock had been wrenched open, and the contents abstracted, and the whole concern was in a very rickety condition.

Inquisitive Mr. Dawkins, turning it over and over in those itching fingers of his, and examining into its construction, did not fail, after a little while, to discover the secret of the false bottom. A touch of the spring, and it flew open. There was nothing inside but a soiled and torn letter. Stuffer had left the room; Mr. Dawkins was alone, and he pounced on the letter with avidity. Wonder of wonders! It was written on thin, foreign paper; it bore the postmark of Melbourne, Australia; and it was addressed to *Hugh Randolph, Esq., Surgeon, Helsingham, England.* What could a letter so addressed be doing in Miss Davenant's casket?

Mr. Dawkins rose softly, and shot the bolt of his office-door; and then, with dextrous fingers, he proceeded to open the torn letter, and to spread it out carefully on his desk. Then he read it.

There was a very curious expression on the face of Mr. Dawkins as he refolded the letter, and put it back in its hiding-place. He had not forgotten his interview with Mr. Peterson, the Australian lawyer, in the smoking-room of the "Royal"; and he had a perfect recollection

of the story of the lost letter as told him by that gentleman, and of the slovenly way in which the affair had been hushed up. Long practice had made Mr. Dawkins expert at putting together a chain of evidence link by link; and in the present case, he reached, without difficulty, what seemed to him the only logical conclusion which the facts, as he knew them, would admit of.

"The whole thing is as clear as mud," he said to himself. "Miss D. was at the post-office the very evening the letter was missing. Miss D. has a certain ebony casket stolen from her, and is so little put about by the loss of it that she wants me to erase it from my list of the stolen articles: on my refusing to do so she goes off in a dead faint. The casket is afterwards recovered, and in a hidden cavity of it is found the missing letter: *ergo*, Miss D. was the person who stole the letter. 'Pon my word, it's as nice a little case as I've had the handling of for some time!"

He rubbed his hands gleefully, and then began to turn over the leaves of one of his memorandum books. "I promised to write to that Australian lawyer in case of anything turning up," he said. "I have his address somewhere. Ah, here it is, 'Mr. Peterson, Exeter Hall Hotel, Strand.'" He began to walk about the room with his hands in his pockets, whistling to himself in a minor key. "I wonder what was Miss D.'s motive for taking that letter," he thought. "But women's motives are about the most difficult things in the world to get at; and I dare say we shall find out what her little game was before we have quite done with the affair. And this is her wedding-day! If I had only known of this thing three hours ago, what a pretty little bomb I might have thrown among the wedding guests while they were enjoying their breakfast! But now it's too late; and Monsieur and Madame are miles away by this time, on the road to Paris. Well, well, we will keep it carefully till they come back. What will Mr. Bruhn think of his grand, black-eyed wife when this pretty story leaks out? By Jove! I shouldn't be surprised if there's six months' House of Correction at the end of it!" He got a sheet of brown paper and some string, and proceeded to tie up the casket. "I'll go and see Miss Fatty about it," he said. "Perhaps I may be able to pick up two or three useful bits of evidence."

So Mr. Dawkins ordered a cab, and was driven up to Irongate House, and ushered into the presence of Miss Easterbrook, who had scarcely had time to recover from the excitement of the morning.

"Will you be good enough to tell me, Miss Easterbrook, whether you have ever seen this article before?" said Mr. Dawkins, as he unwrapped the brown paper.

"To be sure I have!" answered the schoolmistress. "It belongs to Miss Davenant, and is one of the articles stolen from this house a few weeks ago."

"Where was it generally kept?"

"On the dressing-table in Miss Davenant's bedroom."

"Was it usually kept locked?"

"That is a question which I am unable to answer. In the absence of Miss Davenant—or of Mrs. Bruhn, as I ought now to call her,—her maid, Esther Sarel, is the only person who can answer your question."

"Had any one access to the casket other than Mrs. Bruhn herself?"

"What a strange question! But I must again refer you to Esther Sarel. Mrs. Bruhn's bedroom was an apartment rarely entered by me."

So the bell was rung, and Esther herself answered it,—a fresh, modest, comely-faced girl, looking even prettier than usual to-day, in the pretty new dress which Mrs. Bruhn had given her in honour of the wedding, and with the heavy coils of her red-brown hair arranged after a more fashionable style than she generally wore them.

Esther, on being questioned, at once acknowledged the casket as the property of Mrs. Bruhn, and confirmed Miss Easterbrook's statement that it stood on the bedroom dressing-table.

"Was it usually kept locked, or unlocked?" asked the superintendent.

"Formerly it used to be unlocked; latterly it was kept locked."

"For how long a time before the casket was stolen was Mrs. Bruhn in the habit of keeping it locked?"

"For three or four months, perhaps. I cannot tell exactly."

"How did you know when it was unlocked, and when it was locked?"

"Because it was part of my duty to dust it once or twice a week. When it was unlocked, the lid rattled a little, the hinges being rather loose. When it was locked, the lid was firm."

"Are you aware whether the casket has a false bottom, or a secret opening of any kind?"

"I am not aware of anything of the kind."

"Do you know what were the usual contents of the casket?"

"Yes, sir. Odds and ends of various kinds belonging to Mrs. Bruhn: bits of ribbon, and different coloured silks, a few old coins, some sticks of lavender, a pair or two of gloves, together with a few other trifles of no great value."

"Are you aware whether Mrs. Bruhn was in the habit of using the casket as a receptacle for letters?"

"I am not aware that it was so used. I never saw Mrs. Bruhn either put letters into, or take letters out of it."

"That will do. You may go."

Very thankfully Esther left the room. She shut the door behind her, and took a few steps along the corridor. Then she stopped to think. What was the object of Mr. Dawkins in putting all those questions to her? she asked herself. Was there not some hidden motive at work? and if so, did it portend any mischief to her dear

mistress? She had not forgotten the scene at the post-office; she had not forgotten Mrs. Bruhn's evident perturbation of mind when informed of the loss of the casket; she had many times been troubled with a dim sense of some mystery, of some dark secret which haunted the life of her mistress; and it seemed to her by no means impossible that this inopportune visit of the police superintendent might be connected in some way with that secret. Some fine instinct seemed to whisper to her that her mistress was threatened by a hidden danger, and that Mr. Dawkins was the man that would strike the blow. But how to ascertain whether such was really the case? She had scarcely put this question to herself when she saw her way to answer it. She slipped off her shoes, and walked back along the corridor past the door of the room in which Miss Easterbrook and Mr. Dawkins were holding confidential converse, till she reached the door of the room next to it. This door was open sufficiently to allow of Esther slipping into the room. Between her and the speakers there was nothing now but a pair of folding doors imperfectly closed. She advanced on tiptoe, and laid her ear close to the opening. Under ordinary circumstances, Esther Sarel would have scorned the act of listening to a conversation which it was not intended that she should hear; but for the sake of her to whom she owed so large a debt of gratitude, she was prepared to do much more than that.

When Esther put her ear to the door, Miss Easterbrook was speaking as if in answer to some previous remark of Mr. Dawkins. "But you must bear in mind," she said, "that I know absolutely nothing about what you term 'that business of the missing letter.' Before going any further, would it not be as well for you to enlighten me in some measure?"

"I beg your pardon. I was under the impression that Mrs. Bruhn must have told you all about it at the time of its occurrence."

"Not a word."

"Well, the case is simply this;" and then Mr. Dawkins went on to detail to his two wondering listeners those facts connected with the letter from Australia with which the reader is already acquainted. "Now this very letter," he finished by saying, "which was missed from the post-office at the exact time that Mrs. Bruhn was there on a visit to Miss Ivimpey, and which was never seen after that time, has this morning been found by me in a secret recess of Mrs. Bruhn's casket, in which place it had been left undiscovered by the thieves who took the casket from Irongate House."

"But you do not mean to assert that the letter in question was stolen by Mrs. Bruhn?" said Miss Easterbrook in strange husky tones.

"I assert nothing. All I say is this: that Mrs. Bruhn will have to prove to the satisfaction of those in a higher position than I am, how it happens that this letter is found hidden away in her casket, in a secret cavity, with which, so far as we know at present, no one but herself was acquainted."

"I cannot, I will not believe Margaret Davenant guilty of taking this letter! Besides, what possible motive could she have for so doing? In what way would such an act benefit her?"

"It does not come within my province to deal with motives," answered Mr. Dawkins. "All I can do is to look at facts as they are, and act accordingly."

"What steps, may I ask, do you purpose taking? Mr. and Mrs. Bruhn, as you are already aware, started three hours ago on their wedding tour."

"I think you also told me that Paris is the first place they will make any stay at. At present, I shall not say a word of this business to a soul, and I need hardly caution you to exercise the same reticence. To-morrow I shall start for Paris. Mr. Bruhn being himself a magistrate, I can lay the whole affair before him without any breach of duty on my part. What my proceedings will afterwards be, will depend entirely on the view which Mr. Bruhn may take of the case."

Esther waited to hear no more, but slipping noiselessly out of the room, she hurried along the corridor and opened a side door which led into the shrubbery. She could not go into the kitchen just yet. She wanted a few minutes to herself in order to collect her thoughts, fluttering here and there like frightened birds, utterly scared by the astounding revelation to which she had just listened. With the recollection still so sharply cut into her memory of what, herself unseen, she had been a witness of through the glass-door of the post-office, supplemented by the statement of Dawkins, she could not, in her heart of hearts, doubt that it was Margaret Davenant who took the letter. What her motive could have been for so doing, Esther did not pause to consider; the only question she asked herself was, "Is it possible for me to save her?"

A question, like many others, very easy to ask, but very difficult to answer. What power had she, poor simple Esther Sarel, to keep back for one single moment the advancing tide that threatened to overwhelm her mistress in its dark waters? All that it lay in her power to do was to warn her. She knew her address in Paris, and might telegraph to her. But in what terms could she word a message that to strange eyes should read like an enigma, but yet one which Mrs. Bruhn herself should clearly understand? Would it not be better to go to Paris in person, to start that very night, a few hours in advance of Mr. Dawkins, and so tell her everything, word for word that she had overheard? Evidently that was the best, the only thing she could do.

She would go down to the station, and inquire at what hour the next train started for London; then she would come back and beg a holiday of Miss Easterbrook, and start at once.

With this idea firmly fixed in her mind, Esther turned towards the house in order to get her bonnet and shawl. As she skirted a large

clump of evergreens, she came suddenly on Mr. Dawkins, who had just said good-bye to Miss Easterbrook, and was on his way back to the town. Esther started, and a tell-tale flush mounted to her face. The Superintendent's sharp eyes were fixed full upon her, and it seemed to her, in the confusion of the moment, as if he could read her thoughts and knew of her intention, and would necessarily try to frustrate it.

Mr. Dawkins had evidently intended at first to pass her without notice, but a second thought seemed to strike him. "Stop a moment, my girl; I want a word or two with you," he said, as Esther was hurrying past.

Esther's eyes dropped, and all the colour faded out of her face as she came to a sudden halt.

"Do you remember calling at the post-office on a certain evening in last June—calling there by Mrs. Bruhn's instructions?"

"I have been at the post-office many times by Mrs. Bruhn's instructions."

"No doubt you have. But on the particular occasion to which I now refer you waited in the inner office for several minutes while your mistress and Miss Ivimpey were talking together. Can you now bring the occasion to mind?"

"Yes, sir, I can."

"Ve—ry good. Now tell me—did you ever hear afterwards, or did it in any way ever become known to you, that on that particular evening a certain letter was missed from the post-office which was known to be there at the time of your visit, and which ought to have been delivered in Helsingham next morning? Is such a circumstance known to you at all?"

"No, sir, I never heard of such a thing before to-day."

"You are positive on that score? You would take your oath to that effect if called upon to do so?"

Esther's lips parted as if she were about to reiterate her previous statement still more positively. Then she hesitated, and was silent.

The superintendent's brow contracted, and his voice took an added tone of sternness when he next spoke. "Now, be careful what you say. Do you mean deliberately to assert that you know nothing of a letter having been missed from the post-office on the evening in question?"

"I have heard something about a missing letter," answered Esther almost in a whisper.

"Do you know who took the letter?"

Esther did not speak.

"Now, do not prevaricate, but tell me the truth as far as it is known to you. I ask you again. Do you know who took the letter?"

"*I took it.*"

Even as the words passed her lips she felt with a wild throb of joy

that her mistress—her darling mistress—was saved; but she was only dimly conscious of the magnitude of her own sacrifice.

It was not an easy thing to surprise Mr. Dawkins, but for this once he was genuinely dumbfounded. He was more than that—he was intensely disgusted. He had upon him something of the feeling of a hunter who believes that he has a lord or lady of the forest in his toils, but on opening his trap finds there nothing but his ordinary game. There had been a sort of *cause célèbre* flavour about this affair of the missing letter so long as he believed a great lady like Mrs. Bruhn to be at the bottom of the mischief; but now that by her own confession the criminal proved to be merely Mrs. Bruhn's maid, it sank at once into the category of commonplace crimes. The romance of the thing was gone as far as he was concerned, and he would at once put it into Stuffer's hands, to work up into proper shape.

"Now, I am going to put one or two more questions to you," said Mr. Dawkins when he had recovered from the astonishment caused by Esther's last words; "but I warn you that you need not answer them unless you like to do so, as whatever you say will probably be used in evidence against you on some future occasion."

"I have nothing to conceal, sir," said Esther sadly. "Ask me what questions you like."

"Still, I would have you remember that you are not bound to criminate yourself by answering. In the first place, I should like to know why you took the letter—what your object was in bringing it away from the post-office?"

"I can't tell why I took it. I had no object in doing so."

"You probably thought that it contained money?"

"No, sir, no such thought ever entered my head. I saw the letter lying on the floor; it had been torn and trampled on. Something seemed to whisper to me to take it, and I took it. Then Miss Ivimpey came into the room, and I was frightened, and got away as soon as I could, taking the letter with me."

"A decided case of kleptomania," said Mr. Dawkins to himself. "But what induced you to select Mrs. Bruhn's casket as a hiding-place for the letter?" he asked.

"I don't know. I did it, but why I did it, I can't tell. I knew of the secret hiding-place. I knew, too, that the casket was kept unlocked, and that Mrs. Bruhn did not look into it once in three months. I put the letter there, intending afterwards either to destroy it or else to hide it somewhere else. A little time after that, Mrs. Bruhn locked the casket, and my chance of removing the letter was gone."

"A queer story altogether," said Mr. Dawkins under his breath. "Hang me! if I know whether to believe her."

Esther was saying to herself, "What a heap of lies I am telling, and how pat they all come into my mouth! My mother used to say that whenever you wanted to tell a lie, the devil was always willing and ready to find the words for you. But my mistress will be saved!"

"Let me see," resumed Mr. Dawkins, who prided himself on his acquaintance with all the local gossip of Helsingham, "are not you and young Ringe, the carpenter, engaged to be married?"

"We are," said Esther; and with that she began to cry as if her heart would break. Since the moment of her confession, no thought of Silas, nor of the effect it might have upon him, had entered her head. Her one great idea—the exculpation of her beloved mistress—had made her oblivious for the time being of all other consequences, so that the words of Mr. Dawkins came upon her with all the freshness of an utter surprise. What would Silas think and do? Would he make her his wife when she came out of prison? No, no! In spite of his love for her, he would never do that. "Oh, my poor heart! my poor heart!" cried Esther aloud, as these thoughts flashed through her mind. And she sank on her knees on the garden pathway, and covered her face with her hands, and wept still more bitterly.

"Come, my poor girl, this will never do," said Mr. Dawkins in a husky voice. "Things may turn out better than we expect. Let us go into the house."

After a few minutes' private conversation with Miss Easterbrook, who, notwithstanding her distress of mind at the tidings told her, was still secretly glad that her favourite Miss Davenant had nothing to do with this ugly business of the stolen letter, Mr. Dawkins quitted Irongate House, taking the ebony casket with him. He turned as he was on the point of leaving the room, and going up to Esther, who was kneeling on the floor with her face buried in the sofa cushions, he said, "Do you still persist in the statement you made to me in the garden?"

No reply in words, but, after a few seconds, an almost imperceptible nod of the head.

Then Mr. Dawkins went. His last words to Miss Easterbrook were—"Do not question her; rather try to comfort her."

There was no need to tell Miss Easterbrook to do that.

Two hours later, Sergeant Stuffer, in plain clothes, drove up to Irongate House in a cab. He came to arrest Esther Sarel, who stood charged on a warrant with stealing a letter, the property of the Postmaster-General.

Esther, who was very calm now, washed her hands and face, smoothed her hair, and put on clean collar and cuffs, and then said that she was ready. Miss Easterbrook pressed the girl to her heart. "God bless you, my dear," she said, with tears in her eyes, "and deliver you out of your trouble! To-morrow I will come and see you."

Esther smiled a sweet, sad smile, and pressed Miss Easterbrook's hand to her lips. Then she got into the cab; Sergeant Stuffer followed; and through the darkness of the November night, Esther was driven off to prison.

(*To be continued.*)

A LOYAL HEART.

By F. M. F. Skene.

IV.

WHEN Ernest Vilalta again awoke to consciousness, only an hour or two later, it was with the sensation of a soft touch, first on his hand, then on his cheek. He opened his eyes, and in the clear starlight he was able to discern the great head of his faithful dog Leo, pressed close to his face, rubbing him gently with his warm lips and tongue in the effort to revive him.

The intelligent animal had been left in the camp when the force to which Ernest belonged had ridden out to meet the French in the terrible combat of the previous day; but when he saw the scattered troops returning, and the one officer to whom his whole being was devoted not among them, the wonderful instinct of his affection had driven him away at once to roam through the darkness of the night over the battle-field, till among all the prostrate forms lying there he succeeded in finding his beloved master.

And again we must pause to state, as we have done with respect to other portions of our little history, that this is no fictitious incident.

"My Leo—my good dog!" murmured Ernest faintly; and the fine animal, overwhelmed with delight at the sound of the well-known voice, tried with all his might to dig away the snow from around his master.

"Ah, poor Leo," sighed Ernest, "that is of no use. You must get better help than your own if you want to save me."

The wise beast seemed to understand him. He ceased his wild scratching at the snow with his great paws, whined uneasily for a few minutes, then he seemed to have taken his resolution. Licking his master's hand as with a last caress, he bounded away over the plain in the direction of the camp.

The dog never slackened his pace for a moment till he reached the tent where Steinsdorf, who was quite restored to health and had been in action all day, lay buried in the heavy sleep of physical weariness. Leo knew him well, for Ernest and he had become fast friends, and were always together in the intervals of their active duties. He was wearing his undress uniform, as the officers had always to be ready for any night attack, and one arm lay outside the rug that covered him. The dog took the sleeve in his mouth and shook it violently until he succeeded at last in awaking the tired man.

Steinsdorf looked up and by the light over the tent door recognized his friend's favourite. "Why, Leo," he said, "what is the matter? Where is your master?"

The animal answered by a long, mournful howl, and then taking

hold again of Steinsdorf he tried with all his might to drag him from his couch. Next he darted to the entrance, looked back entreatingly at the officer, and returning once more made every effort to induce him to rise.

Steinsdorf understood the situation at once, for he knew the dog's remarkable sagacity. Springing from his bed he roused his soldier servant who was sleeping near him rolled in his cloak, and said :

"Get up at once ! Captain Vilalta is lying wounded on the field ; the dog has found him and will guide us to him. Get some more men with lanterns and follow me."

The rescue party were soon on their way—the dog rushing on in front and going much faster than they, so that he had constantly to retrace his steps. He led them, however, in an absolutely straight line to the spot where Ernest lay, his feet and limbs embedded in the snow, and one arm behind his head so that it was raised a little from the ground.

Steinsdorf flashed the light of his lantern eagerly on his face, and for a moment greatly feared that his friend was dead, so pallid and inanimate was he ; but bending down over him he detected that he still breathed, though he had lapsed into unconsciousness. After wetting his lips with some wine they had brought, he directed the men to raise him carefully on their shoulders and carry him back to the camp.

Day was breaking when they reached Steinsdorf's tent and laid his friend down on the rough couch he had quitted, and the army surgeon was quickly brought to examine the wounded man. He shook his head gravely over his condition. "The Herr Hauptman must be taken to the nearest hospital at once," he said. "His foot must be amputated without delay, and the operation cannot well be performed here. I do not think he can live."

Steinsdorf obtained leave from his commanding officer to convey his friend himself to the hospital—the same service which poor Ernest had rendered to him in far less serious circumstances—but he could not remain with him. Duty called him back to the camp, and it was not until a few days later that he was able again to pay him a visit.

Steinsdorf was dismayed at the condition in which he then found him. Ernest was alive—but that was all that could be said for him. His foot had been amputated, but he was utterly prostrate, and fever had set in. He did not recognize his friend ; indeed, he took no notice of any one, but lay with closed eyes and white lips, through which restoratives were sometimes forced. As in Steinsdorf's own case, the nursing and care which could be given to Vilalta amongst many other sufferers was quite inadequate to his critical state. It was very evident that he must die if he remained in that crowded, stifling ward with very small attention paid to him ; in fact, the hospital surgeon said as much plainly.

"Then there would not be much more risk for his life if he were

put into an invalid bed in the train and sent on a day's journey?" asked Steinsdorf.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "His chances are about equally bad either way!—it would be a desperate experiment to move him; but you are welcome to try it, if you like, for he will not live many days if he remains here."

Steinsdorf was a bold, energetic man, and he took his resolution at once. He would send Ernest, under suitable care, to the house of his own parents at Augsburg, where he knew his mother and Lottchen would nurse him with the most unremitting devotion, and bring him back to life, if existence on this earth were still to be granted him. Steinsdorf was the more set on carrying out this somewhat daring scheme, because he knew that he could no longer have any opportunity of even seeing Ernest himself again: his regiment had been summoned to the front with others in order to reinforce the besiegers of Paris, and henceforth his post was to be beneath the very walls of the beleaguered city, many leagues from the hospital where his friend was lying. He had no doubt of his parents' entire willingness to receive Ernest Vilalta under their roof, and do all they could for him, as they were well aware of the services he had rendered to their own son, when much less seriously wounded; and during the time that Steinsdorf himself lay in hospital, a very warm friendship had sprung up between his sister Lottchen and the friend who visited him as often as he could.

That same evening Steinsdorf succeeded in getting Ernest carefully conveyed in the ambulance to the train, where he was placed in an invalid carriage under the care of one of the hospital officials, who agreed, on the receipt of a large bribe, to attend him as far as Augsburg. The next morning, when the train with its unconscious passenger rolled into the Augsburg station in the grey winter's dawn, Lottchen and her father were both there awaiting it; and very soon Ernest, whose life seemed flickering within him, like an expiring flame, was laid down with all possible care in the best room of their house, and a skilful doctor was quickly summoned to be in attendance on him. The issue remained, however, doubtful for a very long time.

Meantime in the old English manor-house the anxiety respecting Ernest's fate had merged almost into despair, at least in the mother's heart.

Christine had seen her dear old father laid in his last resting-place beside the unforgotten wife of his youth, and his peaceful departure had seemed so fair a Euthanasia at a time when the newspapers were full of daily statements as to the slaughter and cruelties of the terrible war, that she felt as if it would be wrong to regret him. Yet she missed him sadly. His cheerful patience and simple childlike faith had helped to support her under all her previous trials, and the courage he had been wont to impart, seemed to fail her now when she was oppressed by cares of many different kinds.

It was seldom, indeed, that her husband could manage to send her a few words by the balloon post, or by means of a carrier pigeon; and then he could only tell her of the sufferings caused within the walls of Paris by the protracted siege, and ask her anxiously for the tidings of their soldier son, which she was so mournfully unable to give him.

Even within the quiet old home there were causes for great anxiety. After the General's death, Alba had completely succumbed to the long strain and fatigue of sleepless nights which she had borne in her attendance on him without ever uttering a word of complaint, or seeking for the smallest relaxation. Indeed, the extent to which she had been tried by her ceaseless ministrations to the old man she loved so well, had never been understood even by those living under the same roof with her. There could be no mistake, however, as to the low fever which fell upon her when her energetic endurance was no longer required, and she lay for weeks in a state of extreme nervous exhaustion.

Christine nursed her tenderly, and Elvira brought her sunny presence into the sick-room whenever her cousin was well enough to be amused by her lively conversation. But poor Ferdinand, excluded from even seeing her who was the very light of his days, wandered about like a restless ghost, finding no comfort anywhere.

His conscience also smote him with regard to his brother. He felt that he ought, long before, to have made the only available effort for obtaining tidings of him, by going himself to the seat of war, there to ascertain, if possible, what his fate had really been. Ferdinand still retained his conviction that Ernest was yet alive; but he thought it very probable that he had been taken prisoner by the French, or was lying wounded and forlorn in some distant spot. In any case it seemed clearly his duty to go in search of him.

It was drawing towards Christmas in that fateful year, and it may be remembered, by those who recall the history of that perturbed time, that a little later a truce of very short duration was effected between the city of Paris and the besiegers in order to give time for negotiations that, it was hoped, might end the war. Rumours of this impending cessation of hostilities had reached the Manor House and were eagerly discussed by Ferdinand and his mother.

"Do you think it would be at all possible for us to return to Paris at once if the truce should be prolonged?" said Ferdinand, anxiously, to Christine, as they sat together poring over the war tidings in the *Times*.

It had occurred to him that if they could return to France at once, taking Alba with them, he might prosecute the search for his brother without any prolonged separation from her.

"Impossible!" answered his mother. "How could you even think of such a scheme? The whole country is in a distracted state, and the people in Paris are starving. The city cannot be sufficiently provisioned again under many weeks. Your father would never allow

me to return. I should care nothing what hardships I went through myself, could I only be with him and Ernest—if it is ever given me to look on my boy's dear face again," she added, with a sob. "But I am bound to consider your sister's welfare, and France is no place just now for a delicate young girl."

Two or three days afterwards Elvira was sent to Ferdinand with a message from Alba that she wished to see him. It was the first time that she had been so far recovered as to be moved out of her bedroom, so that the young man's heart beat high as he followed his sister eagerly to the little boudoir where Alba was to be allowed to remain for a few hours that day. After she had ushered him in, Elvira softly closed the door and left them alone.

Alba was lying on a sofa near the window, and, for a moment, Ferdinand could not utter a syllable in his deep emotion at sight of the change which illness had wrought in her. If she had been beautiful in her days of health and activity, she seemed to him now to be endowed with an ethereal loveliness scarce belonging to earth at all. Ferdinand raised one of her small white hands almost reverentially to his lips in silence, and Alba, seeing how much he was moved, asked him to sit down beside her, and spoke for a few minutes on indifferent subjects. Then when she saw that he had quite recovered his equanimity she lifted her clear, shining eyes to his face and said quietly:

"Now, dear Fernan, I must tell you why I asked you to come and see me. I wished to say that to you which has been lying heavy on my mind all through these weeks; but it was not a matter I could broach to your mother. Fernan," she continued, almost solemnly, as he looked inquiringly towards her, "why do you not go in search of your brother?"

At these words the crimson tide mounted to his very forehead in the rush of conflicting feelings they evoked; but he did not speak. She went on, very gently:

"Forgive me for venturing to advise you, but I know that there is none other in this house who could do so. Elvira is too young and thoughtless, and your mother cannot bid you go; for it might be to send her only remaining son into danger. Yet do you not see how terribly she is tried, mentally and physically, by this cruel suspense about Ernest? I think it will kill her if it goes on much longer."

Ferdinand's hands were clenched in the effort to repress the bitterly painful feelings that overpowered him. Was it for Ernest's sake only then that Alba had sent for him? Was it of his brother alone she had been thinking all this time? Alba could not guess what was in his mind as he had turned his face away from her; but she believed she had a painful duty to perform on poor Christine's account, and she went steadily on with it.

"This interval of the truce will make it a very safe time for you to go, Fernan; it seems to have come most opportunely."

He started as if he had been stung ; and his look was almost fierce as he exclaimed : " Alba, is it possible you can insult me by supposing that danger to myself has kept me back ? "

" I could hardly believe it," she answered ; " it was so unlike you, Fernan. Yet, I will own I have not been able to understand the reason of your delay."

He sprang to his feet and began to pace up and down the room, struggling vehemently with himself. At last he came back to the sofa where Alba lay, and looking down on her lovely face, said, hoarsely :

" If you would know the reason of my delay, Alba, it was simply that I could not leave you in your dangerous illness."

How poor, how meaningless seemed these words ! All that he dared to say, compared with the storm of passionate feeling that was raging in his breast—goading him to pour out to her, then and there, all the boundless love he bore her—the hopes of his whole life's happiness which centred in her alone.

Yet, as Alba heard them, she raised her head involuntarily to turn on him a look only for one moment, and instantaneously withdrawn, which sent a thrill of delight through his whole being. It seemed like a flash of revelation as to what he was to her in truth ; but so quickly was it veiled under the white eyelids, which closed as if she were growing faint, that he could not tell if he had seen aright. He feared it was a mere fancy on his part, for there was no gleam of the same tender expression in her eyes when she opened them again ; and he said to her calmly :

" Alba, whether I have been right or wrong, I will do now whatever you ask me. Do you wish me to go away at once in search of Ernest ? "

Her colour went and came for a moment, leaving her at last deadly pale ; she clasped her hands tightly together, and said :

" I wish you to do what is right : to relieve your mother's cruel anxiety—to be true to your brother."

" That is enough," he answered quickly. " I start to-night. Alba, farewell ! " He bent down, kissed her hand once more, and left the room.

V.

Ferdinand kept his word to Alba, and started that same night on his difficult quest. His mother did not even wish to hold him back, as she might have done, in spite of her devouring anxiety about Ernest, had she not believed that the short truce would render his expedition comparatively safe. She loaded him with letters and messages for his father, imagining that it would be possible for him to penetrate into Paris during the temporary suspension of the bombardment ; and with the same idea Fernan made straight for the ramparts, when he had

been brought as near the invested city as the disorganized railways could convey him.

There, however, he found the tremendous forces of the Prussian army immovably massed around the walls ; and in spite of the truce, neither ingress nor egress was possible. He could not hope therefore for the assistance which he had thought his father's position might have given him. His only resource was to try to obtain access to the colonel of his brother's regiment and make inquiries from him.

It was no easy matter to force his way into this officer's presence, for he was deeply engaged making all manner of arrangements for a renewal of active hostilities, as orders had come from headquarters that the truce was to be brought to an end almost immediately. His tent was crowded with officers, and it was some time before Ferdinand could obtain a hearing at all. Then, when he had made known his desire to ascertain the fate of his brother, he only received a somewhat curt and unsatisfactory answer.

"Do you suppose at such a time as this we can tell what becomes of every man that is sent wounded into hospital or left on the field? Vilalta fell in the engagement which deprived us of many a good soldier just before we moved to the front. I believe he was not killed on the spot, but I suppose he may have died since, for I know his name has been erased from the roll of our troops."

The colonel spoke quickly and harshly enough, but he was not without feeling, for seeing that the young man who had addressed him grew deadly white at his words, he called out in a loud imperative voice :

"Does any one here know whether Captain Vilalta survived his wounds or not?"

A young officer disengaged himself from the crowd, and coming forward, saluted the colonel as he said :

"He did, sir, for a time."

"Speak out, then ; say what you know and have done with it. Satisfy this gentleman and let us get back to business ; we have no time to waste."

"I was in hospital when Hauptman Vilalta was brought in. He was alive, but that was all ; his foot was amputated the same day. He was removed in the ambulance quite insensible a few days after, and I never heard of him again." He repeated his salute and retired.

"That is all we can tell you, sir," said the colonel, addressing Ferdinand. "I think you may conclude the poor fellow has succumbed to the fortune of war. A glorious death after all! Good morning, sir."

The colonel beckoned to his officers, who pressed in round the table where he sat, and Fernan had no resource but to make his way, giddy and heart-sick, to the door of the tent, quite overcome by the tidings he had received. There, however, he was met by the young officer who had spoken, and was evidently moved with compassion for him.

"I can give you one clue," he said, "by which you may perhaps learn the fate of your brother. He was removed from the hospital by an officer who was his greatest friend, Herr Steinsdorf. He does not belong to our regiment, but he is in camp, and I can give you the number and name of the troop he belongs to."

Ferdinand thanked him eagerly. He knew the name of Steinsdorf well, for Ernest had often mentioned him in his letters, after giving the history of his first acquaintance with him, and a gleam of hope filled his heart that he might hear his brother was yet alive.

He spent nearly the whole day traversing the Prussian lines under the ramparts from end to end before he was at last directed to the tent where Steinsdorf was preparing for such brief rest as an officer on duty may obtain. Exhausted by fatigue, and feverish with anxiety, Ferdinand almost staggered into the presence of his brother's friend. He could not wait for any ceremony of introduction, but held out his hands, exclaiming: "I am Ferdinand Vilalta; can you tell me if my brother Ernest yet lives?"

"Ferdinand Vilalta!" said Steinsdorf, starting to his feet and warmly grasping the hand of his visitor. "Welcome a thousand times! Yes, thank heaven, the dear fellow is alive—did you not know it? He is at Augsburg with my parents."

The relief from the long strain of anxiety was so great, that Fernan, strong man as he was, sank into a chair. Steinsdorf hastily got some wine, which soon revived his unexpected guest, and then taking a seat beside him, prepared to tell him all he wished to know.

"Did you come here to seek for Ernest?" he said. "But surely you have had his letters telling you where he was?"

"No, indeed! we have not received a single word from him for many weeks. We have been devoured with anxiety, especially my poor mother."

"Ah! he has often spoken to me of her and of you, his twin brother! But I cannot understand your not having heard from him. My sister, who has been helping to nurse him, told me she had written to his mother for him many times—he dictated the letters to her."

Here we may as well explain the mystery of these missing letters, which Ferdinand afterwards discovered. Lottchen had in truth written the loving epistles, in which Ernest sent all details of his state to his mother, and addressed them most carefully "to the gracious lady, Señora Vilalta at the Manor House, England," but she entirely forgot to put the name of the post town in addition, so that the letters wandered about from county to county bearing innumerable post-marks and hieroglyphics till—as in the disturbed state of Germany they could not be returned to Augsburg—they are supposed to have vanished into infinite space and were never more heard of.

Ferdinand and Steinsdorf sat together for some time, going over all the details of Ernest's history since the night when his faithful dog

had found him in the snow and brought him the timely succour whereby his life was saved. Then, after a long conversation, Steinsdorf insisted that Ferdinand should accept his hospitality for that night and remain with him in his tent till he started for Augsburg next day, and that being amicably settled they were both soon fast asleep on their rough couches.

Meantime, in the happy family home at Augsburg, the good Steinsdorfs had been keeping their Christmas feast with all the quaint pretty customs which make that joyful season of the year so pleasant in Germany. They had extended their festivities to the day of the "Three Kings," as Twelfth Night is there designated, and the glittering Christmas tree had been lighted up again that evening for the last time.

Among the presents which had been handed down from it, was the daintiest pair of crutches that could be manufactured of polished wood, with blue velvet cushions to support the arms and silver bands to strengthen the sticks and prevent any risk of their breaking when used. These had been given with a thousand tender good wishes to Ernest Vilalta, the beloved guest whom the most devoted care had nursed back to life.

After many weeks of fever and much pain and weakness, he was at last quite convalescent, and had for some days been able to lie on a sofa in the common sitting-room into which he was wheeled from his bed; but he had made no attempt to move about on his mutilated limb, till the timely present of the crutches tempted him to try.

On the day after Twelfth Night he did with their help manage to convey himself once or twice the whole length of the room, but it must be owned that it was rather a clumsy performance and very fatiguing to him, so that he was glad to lay the crutches aside and lie down once more on his couch, with Lottchen, his indefatigable nurse, sitting beside him. There was no one else in the room, but her company was all he could possibly desire, and he watched her with admiring eyes, as she employed her deft little hands on some silken embroidery while she talked to him in the clear sweet tones of her charming voice, and turned her bright face towards him with sympathetic eyes and sunny smile. She spoke in English, although, of course, Ernest was quite familiar with German; but Lottchen said she had given herself a great deal of trouble to learn the language of his fatherland, so she wished to practise it now; and Ernest often smiled at her translations of the long interwoven sentences of her native idiom.

He was not smiling, however, now. He was looking extremely sad, and the eyes which he bent on her fair sweet face were full of a mournful yearning which could not fail to attract her attention. She glanced at him anxiously once or twice; then let her work drop from her hands and turned to him with much concern.

"Herr Ernest, what has caused the sorrowful shadow that seems to have fallen over you to-day?"

"I have more reasons to feel sad than I dare tell you, Fraülein Lottchen," he answered. "You know that now I am almost well enough to travel, and am bound to leave very soon this hospitable home where I have received such unspeakable kindness from the dearest and most generous friends in the world. I have, indeed, trespassed on their goodness far too long."

"Ah, no! do not say that," exclaimed Lottchen, impulsively; "it has been the most highly prized happiness to have you here for us all. Our Wilhelm's friend," she added, as if she feared she had spoken too warmly; then continuing: "It will be great pain to part, no doubt, but you have promised to come back to see us very soon. You have often spoken of the joy it will be to you to see your gracious lady mother again; she must be cruelly longing for you."

"Yes," he said; "it will be blessed indeed to see my dear mother. It has troubled me that she has not answered any of the letters you so kindly wrote for me; but I suppose the war has put all the posts into confusion. When, however, these first days of pleasant reunion are over, what remains to me but a dreary expanse of life without the faintest hope of that which alone could make it happy or valuable to me?"

Lottchen looked up at him with a questioning gaze in her soft brown eyes.

"I do not know what that hope is of which you speak," she said.

"Do you not understand," he answered, hesitatingly, "that a mother's love, however precious, is not all that a man requires to bless and brighten his life? There is a closer companionship for which he must pine, without which the whole world is a desert to him."

She still kept her eyes with their eloquent question turned towards him, until he added in a lower tone:

"I mean the love of a wife—a second self."

At these words the wild-rose tint of Lottchen's pretty complexion flushed to a bright crimson. She caught up her embroidery again and tried to work at it with trembling hands. Ernest gazed at her with intense eagerness, and as she did not speak, he added gently:

"Can you not feel for me, Fraülein Lottchen, knowing me to be for ever deprived of that best hope?"

"I do not know it," said the straightforward little German. "Why should you not possess that hope like other men, Herr Ernest?"

"Is this no reason?" he asked, vehemently, snatching up one of the crutches which lay by his side. "Am I not to be for all the rest of my life a helpless cripple, dismissed from the army, incapable of getting my own living—therefore, almost a pauper: for my father cannot give me much. A useless burden, in short, upon my family. Should I not be a selfish, senseless wretch if I dared to ask any woman to share such a life as that with me?"

"Not if she loved you," said Lottchen, steadily, though she did not raise her eyes.

Ernest started up from his cushions, leaning forward to grasp her hand, though literally unconscious in his excitement, that he had done so.

"But, Lottchen," he said, eagerly, "think for a moment. If even it were possible that there could be one so dear, so self-forgetting, as to care a little for a poor maimed cripple like myself, could it possibly be right for me to take advantage of such goodness, and to bind her down for ever to a hard, dull existence—nursing a poor invalid—deprived of all the gaieties and amusements into which he could not enter?"

"You do not take the right view of it," she said, with grave composure. "If she loved him, she would rejoice; not that he should suffer, but that, as suffering was in the wise providence of God assigned him, she should thus be able for that very reason to be more to him than a wife could be to a gallant officer, with all the glories of the world open before him." Her voice trembled slightly as she spoke, and Ernest caught both her hands in his and exclaimed, wildly, passionately, with all his soul in his eyes:

"Lottchen, do you know what you are saying? You are giving me hope that you—even you—will come to be the angel of my broken life. For you know—yes, you must know—it is you whom I love—whom I have loved since the first day when I saw you in your sweetness standing by your brother's bedside. Oh, Lottchen, dare I believe that it could be enough of happiness to you to share my existence, maimed and helpless as I am? Dare I ask of you so great a blessing?"

She turned her fair, truthful face towards him, tears in her brown eyes, soft flushes on her cheek, and said, with strong emotion:

"Not only would it be enough of happiness, but it would be all this earth could ever give me. I seek, I ask no other. Ernest, I think that I should die if I were parted from you,"—and she let her head fall upon his hands, sobbing aloud. After that, we need not attempt to describe the blissful hour those two childlike lovers spent together, revealing to each other in most minute detail, a fact which had been patent to every one who had witnessed their intercourse for many weeks before.

But the poverty Ernest had so pathetically mourned would not be theirs. The Steinsdorfs were wealthy people, and they had always intended that Lotta should have such a portion as would enable her to marry whom she pleased. Already the whole plenishing of her future home had been prepared by her careful mother, and there were innumerable cupboards filled with snowy white linen, and chests full of silver plate, and other bountiful supplies, so that the young couple could be established in comfort without any delay.

That same evening a formal betrothal took place between Ernest Vilalta and Lotta Steinsdorf in presence of the whole household, as is the custom in Germany, and the good old pastor, who was afterwards to marry them, was invited to attend and give them his blessing.

There was one spectator of this preliminary ceremony who appeared to be most deeply interested in it. The great dog, Leo, placed himself in front of the young couple, and gazed with the utmost attention at Ernest, while he placed on Lottchen's finger the only ring he had ever worn himself. It was of plain gold, bearing a little shield on which was engraved the arms of the Vilalta family, and he told her smiling, that it effectually proved she already belonged to them. When all was done, and the pastor had departed, Lottchen gravely decked Leo with white satin ribbons in token of his participation in their wedding joys.

VI.

Two days after the betrothal of Ernest and Lottchen, Ferdinand Vilalta arrived at Augsburg, and hastened as quickly as possible to the abode of the Steinsdorfs. There as it happened he was met at the door by the good house-mother herself, who welcomed him with the utmost delight, and having ushered him into the invalid's room, gently closed the door and left the brothers together.

Their joy in this almost unhoped for reunion was inexpressible, and only when they had grown composed did Ferdinand burst into passionate expressions of thankfulness that Ernest was restored to them after their long anguish of suspense and fear.

"And after all," he exclaimed, "our terrors were scarcely worse than the reality. I have heard from Wilhelm Steinsdorf of your terrible night in the snow, alone with your desperate wounds. The marvel is indeed that you did not succumb to the cold and pain of that cruel vigil."

"There is my preserver," said Ernest, pointing to Leo, who was couched close to him on the lower end of the sofa, and Ferdinand flung his arms round the huge animal and gave him a vehement caress.

"But tell me now of them all at home," exclaimed Ernest. "My mother—how is she? Did she not receive my letters? I sent her many after the fever left me and I regained my consciousness."

"She never had one of them," said Ferdinand, "and I do not think she could physically have borne up much longer. But that is all over now; I telegraphed from Versailles to tell her you were safe after I had seen Steinsdorf."

"And, Ferdinand, tell me—my grandfather?"

Ernest fixed his eyes with a peculiar expression on his brother as he spoke. The answer, of course, was given sorrowfully enough that the good old man had passed away many weeks previously.

"I knew it," said Ernest, in a low voice. "Was it not on the same date as the night in which I lay wounded in the snow?"

"Now I think of it, I believe it was precisely then," said Ferdinand surprised. "But how did you hear of his death?"

"I did not hear of it; but, Ferdinand—I saw him. He came and stood beside me when life seemed at its lowest ebb and I was almost in despair. He came, and said words to me which raised me up again to faith and hope and perseverance—words that will abide with me as a source of strength for all the rest of my life."

Fernan listened in astonishment. "It must have been a dream," he said at last.

"Perhaps so; I cannot tell," replied Ernest. "My conviction at the time was that I had never been more perfectly wide-awake—the pain of my wounds had kept me from sleeping. But the manner of his appearance to me can make no difference as to its weighty influence on my life. I can never forgot the words he spoke and they will be a law to me for evermore."

He seemed unwilling to continue the subject, and passed on quickly to ask various questions about the other members of the family and their future plans. Then he spoke of the wonderful kindness the Steinsdorfs had shown him, and with what care and tenderness he had been nursed through his long dreary illness. And now, Fernan," he said, while joy lit up his whole face, "I have a special friend to whom I must introduce you."

He touched a little silver bell which stood on the table near him, and when the servant whom it had summoned appeared, he told him to beg Fraülein Lotta to be good enough to come to him.

"Ah, you mean Steinsdorf's sister," said Fernan; "he told me how carefully she had tended you."

"Yes," said Ernest, as Lottchen came into the room, looking specially winning and charming with her mingled smiles and blushes. "Steinsdorf's sister certainly, but something more." He took her hand, and drawing her forward placed it in that of his brother. "*Your* sister also, Fernan, for she is a part of myself—my betrothed —my future wife."

Ferdinand sprang to his feet with a strange incoherent cry, which surprised Ernest very much.

"Your betrothed! Your future wife!" he cried. "You love her! Tell me, Ernest, is it so—or am I dreaming? Are you really bound for ever to this lady? Will you never seek to win any other?"

"I should think not, indeed," said Ernest, half angrily. "Have I not told you she is my betrothed? I do not understand you, Fernan. Can you look at her and think it extraordinary that I should love her and her alone in all the world?"

"No, no! You mistake me," said Ferdinand, who had succeeded while his brother spoke in stilling his wildly beating heart. "There is, indeed, no ground for surprise, but only for the truest joy. I think you are happy beyond words to have gained so beautiful a prize, and I am scarce less happy in winning this charming sister." He kissed Lottchen's hand with the courtly grac ewhich was a characteristic of all the family. Then he went on to tell Lottchen how his parents

would welcome her as their dear daughter, and how delighted Elvira would be to have a sister of her own to love and cherish.

Ernest listened well pleased, but when Lottchen took the opportunity of a break in the conversation to slip quietly out of the room, her lover did not detain her, for he felt certain there must have been some cause for his brother's excitement, and he was anxious to penetrate the mystery at once. No sooner had the door closed on Lottchen, than he said imperiously, "Now, Fernan, tell me what you meant by your strange manner. Is it possible you can object to my engagement, having seen my peerless Lotta?"

"No, indeed," said Fernan, half laughing, "quite the contrary. The truth is I was so overjoyed that I was almost beside myself; I felt as if you had suddenly opened the doors of a paradise to me."

"I believe I have opened the doors of a paradise to myself, but how on earth can I have done so for you? a sister-in-law, however charming, does not make a man's happiness," said Ernest brusquely.

"No," murmured Fernan, "but there is only one in all this world who can make my happiness, and I have feared that I might never dare to seek her love if my twin brother had stood between her and me as I thought he did."

"I!" exclaimed Ernest. "I have never loved any one but Lottchen. Of whom do you speak, Ferdinand?"

"Of Alba Wyndham."

"Alba! is it so indeed—do you love her, Ferdinand?"

"More than my life," said Ferdinand, with deep emotion; "I have loved her from the first moment we ever met, but I believed that she was as dear, as precious to you as she was to me, and I could not bring myself to blast the whole life of my twin brother. But," he added smiling, "I am free now to tell Alba of my love. And now, Ernest, you are tired and must rest awhile."

Next morning Ferdinand came down to breakfast with a strong determination in his own mind that he would start that same evening for England, in order that he might put his fate to the final test, and learn if Alba did indeed love him well enough to be his wife. He little dreamt of the stumbling-block that lay even then as a formidable barrier on his homeward path. When the excellent coffee, made by Lottchen's own little hands, and the long German rolls had duly provided a very pleasant repast, the good Frau Steinsdorf intimated to Ferdinand that she wished to speak to him alone; so he followed her to her room and sat down beside her while she entered on the subject she wished to discuss.

She then informed him that his opportune arrival removed a great difficulty from their arrangements, which had been troubling herself and her husband very much. Now that Ernest was convalescent it was clearly his duty, as it was indeed his wish, to go home and give his mother the comfort of seeing him alive and well after all her cruel anxiety on his account.

"But," continued the lady, "neither Ernest nor Lottchen can endure the idea of being parted. In fact, as regards my daughter, nothing would induce her to allow her beloved to go alone on that long trying journey in his still weak state of health. Of course she can only go with him as his wife, and that might be accomplished; but both her father and I myself feel most strongly that we could not allow an inexperienced young girl to set out without any protector for your distant Fatherland in charge of a helpless invalid. Now, however, your fortunate arrival, Herr Ferdinand, has happily solved the problem. With you as an escort from Augsburg to England our child and her lover will be perfectly safe. We have decided then, my spouse and myself, to ask you to remain with us for the time necessary to complete the wedding arrangements, and then to accompany the young married couple to your family home."

"To remain here—not to start for England at once!" exclaimed Ferdinand, literally stumbling over his words in the consternation which seized him at this exasperating proposal. "But for what length of time do you mean me to stay? Not more than one day surely, you cannot intend that I should delay any longer?"

"One day," said Frau Steinsdorf, smiling, "that would indeed be a rapid form of nuptials. I think I need not say to you it is impossible; three weeks' notice must be given for a marriage to take place in our pastor's church, and after that again there are some ceremonies to be gone through. One month will be the shortest possible time for all formalities, as well as the preparations for our Lottchen's long journey, so we shall hope, Herr Ferdinand, to have the honour and pleasure of entertaining you for that period in our modest home, where your presence gives a much-desired pleasure."

With that the good lady made him an elaborate curtsey, and quitted the room, beaming with satisfaction that she had so happily brought her plans to a favourable issue, leaving Ferdinand absolutely speechless with horror and amazement at the prospect of a month's separation from his beloved Alba, a month's tormenting doubts and fears as to his ultimate fate.

For a long time—he never knew how long—he remained plunged in the depths of desolation and despair. At length his loyal heart reasserted itself. After all it was for his Ernest—his twin brother—he was asked to do this; would he not be vile and selfish to refuse? and with one long sigh poor Fernan gave up the struggle and yielded to this last sacrifice.

VII.

Ferdinand had one consolation in the detention at Augsburg which had cost him such a cruel struggle, that at least he could write to his Alba without even an hour's delay. And he did so. The month of penance passed slowly enough, but he was able to bear it more

patiently than he could have hoped, from the certainty that his Alba would know all he felt for her long before he could hope to come into her dear presence.

At last, however, all the elaborate preparations for the marriage of the precious daughter of the house were completed, and the blissful wedding-day arrived. Ferdinand drove with his brother to the little Protestant church, where the pretty Lottchen presently came with her parents, looking very charming in her bridal robes. Ernest, radiant with happiness, took his place by her side, and the old pastor solemnly united them, and then preached a little sermon on the duties of married persons. It struck Ferdinand that the good old man was singularly like the pictures of Queen Elizabeth, for he wore a rich black silk gown, trimmed with velvet, and a stiff lace ruff which stood up round his neck to an amazing height. There was no doubt, however, that he tied the knot most effectually, and that same afternoon the young couple started on their way to England with their kind brother, followed by the blessings and good wishes of all who knew and loved little Lottchen.

It was a tedious and difficult journey, with many vexatious delays, and sad sights from the disastrous effects of the war were continually around them as they made their slow way to the English shores. Fernan congratulated himself often that he had not left Ernest and Lottchen to battle unaided with all the unpleasant episodes that met them by the way. He was so moved by compassion, indeed, at sight of the condition to which his brother, once so strong and active, was reduced by his lameness, that he voluntarily suggested their remaining one day in London, in order that he might be measured for a mechanical foot which would render him less helpless in moving about.

The four-and-twenty hours spent there for this purpose was the last delay which Ferdinand was called upon to endure by his noble loyalty to his brother.

At length, on the evening of a bright spring day, they reached the old Manor House where his fate was to be decided, and he was to learn whether his lovely Alba was to become, as he had expressed it in his letter to her, the angel of his life. The meeting amongst them all, which took place as soon as Ernest could be assisted up the steps into, the hall, was full of excitement and emotion to the whole family, and perhaps none but Alba herself observed that Fernan grew perfectly white in the dread suspense of the moment, for although he saw once more the fair angelic face that had haunted his dreams by night and his thoughts by day since he last had looked upon her, it was impossible that he could speak to her amid all the impassioned greetings that were going on around him.

There was the first rapturous embrace between Christine and the beloved son she had mourned as dead, and then the quick turning to welcome the young wife and thank her with deepest gratitude for all

the care and tenderness she had bestowed on Ernest, even before he was her own. Then Elvira claimed attention from both her brothers and from the new sister whom she was delighted to welcome, and Alba was warmly greeted by Ernest, while Fernan could only gaze on her with beseeching eyes and lips silent from the very strength of his emotion. Leo the faithful dog, who had of course accompanied them from Augsburg, was not forgotten in this happy meeting, and the marvellous service he had rendered to Ernest was present in the minds of all as they bestowed on him many a warm caress.

Then they passed into the drawing-room, which Elvira had decorated with laurel and myrtle in honour of the wedding of her hero brother, and there Lottchen was divested of her hat and cloak so that they could see more clearly the bright happy face of Ernest's bride, and bestow fresh kisses on it in their pleasure at the charming sight.

"Now I am sure you are all famished," said Christine, when the first joyful excitement had somewhat subsided, "and you must be very tired, too; so I think you had better all come to supper, which is quite ready in the dining-room. After that we must let you go to bed to have a good night's rest, though I feel as if I could hardly part from any one of you even for those few hours."

She put her arm round Lottchen, as she spoke, and let her away, while Elvira followed with Ernest, to whom she was chattering gaily, telling him how charmed she was with his pretty bride, and much more in the same strain to which he listened eagerly.

Thus for one moment, as they all passed out at the door, Alba and Fernan were alone together, for he had impulsively laid a detaining grasp on her arm. Looking down into her pure sweet face with straining eyes, almost breathless, he exclaimed: "Alba, you have had my letter. Tell me, tell me——"

He could say no more in his agitation. Then she raised the forget-me-not blue eyes, shining through bright tears of emotion, to his own, and yielding both her hands to his grasp, said in the low musical tones he knew so well:

"Oh, Fernan, I have always loved you—all my life!"

Neither of them could add another word, for Elvira came running back to beg them to hasten, as their mother was anxious Ernest and Lottchen should have their supper. But it was enough even for Fernan's ardent longing. Alba went quickly on with Elvira, and he followed in a dream of ecstasy which made him answer often in a very irrelevant manner to the remarks which were addressed to him at the supper-table. His mother glanced at him once or twice with a smile on her lips, and she detained him after the others had wished her good-night and gone to their rooms.

"My Fernan," she said, "this is a most blissful day for us all, but I think you have found a special happiness of your own, have you not?"

"Yes, indeed! Oh, mother! Alba is mine, the dearest, sweetest—ah, you do not know how I have loved her, though I dared not speak of it."

"I think I did know it very well, my son. Do you think a mother's eyes can be blind to that which affects the happiness of her children? I was perfectly aware of your strong attachment to dear Alba, and of hers for you. But I could not enter on the subject with you so long as you were silent yourself respecting it. I have never forced the confidence of my sons."

"Because they were always most ready and thankful to give it you, dearest mother," said Ferdinand, warmly embracing Christine.

The mother and son stood for a moment locked in each other's arms, and then she gently disengaged herself. Seeing that Fernan was almost worn out with the fatigue and agitation he had gone through, she said with a smile, "Now you must take my good-night kiss, dear child, as in the days when you and Ernest would never go to sleep in your little cots until you had received it. You can go to rest with a most thankful heart, for I am well assured your generous self-denial in the past will bring a special blessing on your married life."

While these events were taking place at the Manor House, Paris, after the long agony of the siege, was a prey to all the horrors of the Commune. This rendered it still impossible for Christine to rejoin her husband according to her earnest desire. But she was able to communicate with him by letter, and having already told him of Ernest's marriage and safe arrival in England, she wrote again as quickly as possible to inform him of the engagement between Fernan and Alba, and to ask his wishes as to their future arrangements.

His answer was not long in reaching them. It contained the warmest congratulations to both his sons for the happy alliances which had been announced to him, but he added that as Ernest's marriage had necessarily been contracted at a distance from his parents, he much wished that they should be present at that of Ferdinand. He, therefore, begged that his wedding with Alba might take place in Paris, so soon as matters were sufficiently quiet there for his family to return to him.

This could not be accomplished till two months later, but in the course of the summer, order having been restored to France under the Government of M. Thiers, the Vilaltas made their way back to Paris, there to find many terrible traces of the war, and of the Commune which had followed; but there was nothing to prevent them from remaining quietly in their own house so long as they wished to do so. There Elvira found that her canaries had been safely protected by her father, but he told her with a shudder at the recollection of the scenes he had witnessed, that he believed they were the only living creatures who had survived the siege.

M. Vilalta, himself, had suffered severely, and his health was much

broken in consequence—he felt unequal for the duties of the onerous position he had held so long; and this having been represented to the Spanish authorities, he was recalled from France with the offer of an appointment in his own country, which would tax his energies much less. Christine, and indeed all the family, heard this news with much satisfaction. They all loved Spain, and looked upon it as their home; and the arrangement was especially beneficial for Ernest, as his father could appoint him his secretary, with which employment his lameness would in no sense interfere. Ferdinand would continue his diplomatic career, and ultimately, of course, join any Legation to which he might be attached; but he was granted, in the meantime, six months' leave on the occasion of his marriage, so that he and Alba—his wife at last—accompanied their parents to Madrid in the autumn of that same year.

A time of great peace and happiness ensued for the Vilaltas, and it could hardly have been said to be disturbed by an event which occurred somewhat later. Elvira, the one of all the family who possessed the most thoroughly southern temperament, and was a veritable Spaniard in every line of her *piquante* face, elected to become the denizen of a northern home in the heart of Germany. Wilhelm Steinsdorf came to pay a visit to his sister and his friends, and there, after a very short time, fell prone at the feet of the brilliant little beauty, declaring that he could not live without her.

Somewhat to the surprise of her parents, Elvira at once agreed to link her fate with his, and left her sunny Spanish home for Augsburg.

Christine felt considerable anxiety as to how her gay, bright-hearted little daughter would accommodate herself to the sober Teutonic life on which she was entering; but when two years afterwards she went to pay Elvira and her husband a first visit, she found to her surprise and satisfaction that the bright young girl had settled down into being a most notable house Fraü; managing her household and her baby with great skill and good sense.

This discovery removed the last of Christine's anxieties, and she felt that she might look forward now in hope to a peaceful evening of her life, which, in its earlier day, had been clouded and agitated by so many storms and vicissitudes.

IN THE LOTUS-LAND.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Letters from Majorca," "The Bretons at Home," etc., etc.

Veiled Beauty of Cairo.

ONE of our most puzzling tasks when we first visited Egypt was to distinguish between the different races or tribes forming the population of the country.

Yet the difficulty has to be overcome if we wish to appreciate and understand what we see around us. Certain dresses, certain colours, certain types of feature, these have their various and distinct interpretation. Every shade of a turban, the manner of wearing the girdle, the flowing Abba, or the white striped cloak, the face-veiling *burko*, or the dark-blue *turbah* falling behind: each and all have their separate meaning and signification.

The distinctions are not learned in a day; but once mastered, your interest in people and country is immeasurably heightened; you feel more in touch with them, can enter into their idiosyncrasies, steer clear of their prejudicies: those feelings, beliefs and superstitions that in this Lotus-Land, this Mohammedan country, are as ingrained and deeply-rooted in the people as the very life-blood which animates them. And to shock their prejudices or to inadvertently throw ridicule upon their favourite superstitions is to establish a mortal enmity between you and them for which, in some dark night, some lonely spot, they would be avenged if opportunity arose; even though you had eaten salt with them.

But from a less serious point of view it is as interesting as it is necessary to know something of the various tribes forming the sum-total of the population of the Lotus-Land.

At a first glance they seem more numerous than they really are; more difficult to distinguish. You feel that for all these distinctions and castes a dictionary is necessary; but they are easily classified, and out of apparent chaos and confusion, order and simplicity soon appear.

The population may be divided into two distinct classes—those claiming descent from the ancient Egyptians, and those composed of the mixed tribes and races who from time to time have settled in the country and become a recognized part of it; a familiar type, though not a native element.

It has already been stated that the ancient Egyptians had nothing in common with the negro races. They were a fine, well-made people, with features very much resembling the white races of Western Africa and Northern Asia. In spite of intermarriage the type has very little changed. What they were four thousand years ago, they are to-day; and a modern Egyptian gazing upon the statues of antiquity, is gazing more or less upon his own likeness.

There is much that is pleasing in the reflexion. The ancient Egyptian was tall, thin and spare, active and energetic; with broad, square shoulders, a nervous physique, and muscles well-developed. The extremities were well-formed, proof of a higher type of race with the ancients as with the moderns; the hands were long and nervous, the feet thin and narrow-heeled, though rather wide-spread at the toes from the habit of wearing sandals. The head was often large in proportion to the body, but the expression of the face was gentle almost to sadness. The forehead was square and somewhat low; the nose short and round, not finely chiselled; the eyes were large and intelligent; the lips thick, but well-formed and kept closed, generally a sign of power, endurance and amiability. The smile was melancholy; the general expression subdued, as if they felt that the mystery of life was a problem they could not solve, ending in that solitary and inevitable journey into the unknown land: the destiny to which all are drifting, and which is more or less constantly present to a thoughtful mind, colouring every motive and influencing every action.

Such were the ancient Egyptians, and such, to a great extent, are the Egyptians of to-day.

Of these ancients, the Fellaheen and the Copts are the true representatives. With them it is a distinction less of race than of religion. In the far-off times of one and the same creed, the Fellah turned Mohammedan; the Copt became Christian. The former has perhaps retained a greater resemblance to the original race. Christianity is more real, more earnest and elevating, and therefore more transforming. They resemble each other still in their ways and habits of life; both have preserved something of the ancient language, the Fellahs, from their more primitive occupations, more perfectly than the Copts.

In other ways, also, the Fellah bears a greater likeness to the ancient Egyptian; in the type of his mind, the morals influencing his life, a certain stiffness of attitude combined with a certain grace. The inhabitants of the plains of Memphis are almost identical with the sculptured figures found at Gizeh; excepting the tribes in the immediate neighbourhood of the Pyramids, who have become distinctly Arabian. The inhabitants of Thebes have not altered. Some

of the watermen of Cairo, exactly resemble certain statues of the Fourth Dynasty, to be seen in the Boulak Museum, proving how little they have changed in spite of the lapse of ages and a certain admixture of races.

A Copt.

In the foreign races who have from time to time migrated from neighbouring countries and gradually assumed a native element, we first of all recognize in Lower Egypt the Semitic race, that mixture of

Hebrews, Syrians, and Arabians, supposed to have sprung from Shem, the son of Noah, who first invaded Egypt in the Third Dynasty, and at the period of the Arabian conquest added largely to their numbers.

Secondly, we have the Mongolian element, which included the Hyksos or shepherd kings, and from which many of the Beduins in the neighbourhood of Alexandria are descended.

Thirdly, the Turkish element comes in, also of Asiatic origin.

Fourthly, arise the Levantine elements, the most mixed of all, and the most difficult to classify and distinguish.

In Upper Egypt the original race was much altered by the blending of two different elements : the Ethiopian and the Negro.

The Ethiopians were not the true negro race, though very dark in colour. They answer almost exactly to the types of the conquered people as represented on the old Egyptian monuments. Of this race the purest examples are found in Nubia and Abyssinia, and in the deserts to the east of the valley of the Nile.

The negro races who intermixed with the population are, for the most part, found in the Upper Valley of the Nile. Despised by the pure Egyptian, they were not allowed to penetrate into the lower, more civilized and more populous portions of the land. It is even possible that when the ancient Egyptians first migrated into the country they found a negro race already established on the banks of the Nile, whom they routed, driving them to take refuge in the very highest and hitherto uninhabited parts of the river. This, however, will probably for ever remain a matter of conjecture. No actual trace of such a state of things has been discovered.

Out of all these changes, migrations, invasions, ten different tribes or elements finally resolved themselves, and to-day compose the population of the Lotus-Land. These are : The Fellahs or Fellaheen ; the Copts ; the Beduins ; the Arabian inhabitants of the towns ; the Berbers or Nubians ; the Negroes, the Turks, the Levantines, the Armenians and Jews, and the Europeans.

Of the true type of the Arabians who conquered Egypt in 640, nothing remains. For more than two hundred years they have become merged in the various tribes or people present in the country. But, though they have disappeared, they have left lasting traces behind them, establishing, apparently for ever, their religion, their manners and customs ; accomplishing what other nations had attempted and failed in. The Persian, the Macedonian, the Roman, the Byzantine, had all in turn endeavoured to establish permanent sway in Egypt, and had not succeeded. This was reserved for the conquering, the energetic Arabs, who, with their strong individuality and their religious fanaticism, were destined to hold a strange influence in the country when they themselves had passed away. And this seems to us the great key to success, its great secret—to be in earnest.

The Fellahs form the greater portion of the population. The word

signifies "peasant," or "tiller of the soil;" and this is what they actually are, at any rate in Middle and Lower Egypt.

In Cairo and Alexandria they call themselves "Oulad el-Beled," (*Children of the town*). These differ somewhat in type from the Fellah or peasant, and consider themselves far in advance of him. They are a little fairer and more refined in appearance than those who pass their lives in the country.

The Fellaheen are generally about middle height, strongly, even massively made, with prominent wrists and ankles. The women are lively-looking and agreeable, possessing a good deal of vivacity and native wit. But they soon lose their beauty and grow old. Both men and women have well-formed heads, with large, projecting foreheads suggestive of capacity and intellect. Many of them look as bright and intelligent as any race of men in the world, an impression strengthened by the extreme brilliancy of their eyes. These eyes are generally black or dark brown, deep set, both soft and sparkling; the hair and beard are also black and curly, but not in the least approaching the coarse type of the negro; the nose is straight and well-marked, the mouth well-formed, the teeth white, regular, and much shown in laughter. In the north their skin is simply brown, becoming darker as one proceeds southward, and almost black in Nubia.

The Fellaheen are the strength and backbone of the country, and form three-fourths of the population.

The inhabitants of the towns—Oulad el-Beled—are a more mixed race; they have intermarried with other tribes, with the usual result.

The Fellahs of the country marry only amongst themselves, and have retained their early type. They are more dependable in their character, more noble and generous; but, as we have said, somewhat coarser in appearance. They are hard-working and industrious, amiable and contented when young; but, like the women, they soon grow old; they are oppressed and heavily taxed, live in mud huts and are badly fed, and long before their time they are aged and bent and disheartened. No longer capable of work, they have nothing to fall back upon, nothing to live for.

It is impossible for the greater part of them in their youth to economize anything for old age; yet they are frugal and sober. In a large number of them, three small rolls of maize, about half the size of one's hand, constitute the chief food of the day. Those who are somewhat better off add to this humble fare a few vegetables, a little milk, chicory, onions and dates. But they all have a hot supper, consisting of a sauce made of onions and butter or onions and linseed oil, very highly seasoned with salt and herbs. They have one common dish, into which each member dips pieces of bread. We have seen exactly the same process going on in the poorest huts of Norway.

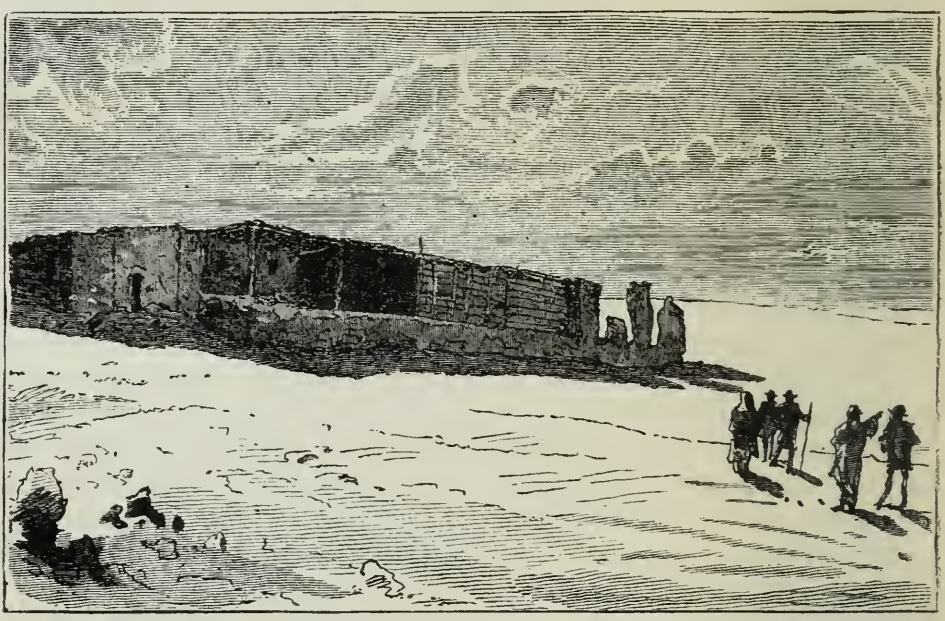
Meat is seldom seen or touched, excepting in the month of Ramadan, their great fast, when throughout the whole month nothing

is eaten from sunrise to sunset, though the whole night, if they please, may be devoted to feasting. Meat then becomes universal, and even the beggars come in for their portion.

They are unlearned and superstitious; Mohammedans, and firm believers in their religion; though, if you ask them its doctrines, they know nothing, excepting that at stated hours they must offer up their prayers. All other creeds are doomed to perdition, a belief which causes them to accept their poverty with a cheerful spirit—it will be made up to them in the next world they tell you.

The Fellah bows down to the superior knowledge of the European, and estimates his wisdom according to the grandeur of his dress.

Their own dress, indeed, is very simple. It usually consists of a



MARIETTE'S HOUSE.

pair of loose drawers and a long shirt of blue cotton or linen called an *eerie*, or a zaáboot when it is of brown woollen stuff; a white or brown felt cap with a tarboosh over it, and upon this a turban of white, red, or yellow cotton or muslin. That the head is so well protected is both necessary and an advantage, for the Fellah generally shaves his head, and without his turban would be an unsightly object never intended by Nature. If they wear shoes they are pointed red or broad yellow morocco. Very often when at work in summer they wear nothing but their cap; in winter, if they can afford it, they keep themselves warm with a brown and white striped cloak. They are a chilly race, and shiver and wrap their cloaks around them in weather that we should consider warm and balmy.

The women dress very much as the men, but in addition they have

the *burko,* or face veil of black crape, and a dark blue muslin or linen veil thrown over the head and falling behind. They nearly all wear brass ornaments, of which they are as fond as the savage tribes; they blacken the edge of their eyelids with kohl, which adds immensely to the expression of their dark eyes, though the custom is not to be recommended; and, with less effect, they stain their finger-nails and the palms of their hands with *henna.* More often than not they also ornament themselves with tattoo marks.

In the towns they dress with a little more attention to detail. The cotton or linen shirt is often replaced by one of silk; they wear a short sleeveless vest of striped silk over it, with excellent effect, and a long vest of striped silk over that reaching to the ankles; a silken girdle is tied round the waist; the whole is covered by a long cloth coat or cloak, the latter the flowing and more graceful *abbayeh.* The small, close-fitting cotton cap is covered with the tarboosh, decorated with a tassel of blue or black silk, and round this they wind a cashmere shawl, or a long breadth of muslin, which forms the turban. They have an endless variety of turbans and head-dresses, which are worn according to their rank. A large proportion of the people cannot wear silk clothes, and fall back upon muslin or cotton.

The women in the towns wear such a quantity of clothing that all grace of form is lost. Perhaps this is of less consequence, as their faces are disguised by the hideous *burko,* which conceals everything excepting the eyes, and you cannot tell whether a particular woman is old or young, plain or beautiful. They wear a shawl round the waist for a girdle, and on going out throw over all a large loose silk gown, which again is covered by a large black or white silk cloak, reaching down to the feet. By this time they look sufficiently packed and bundled up for a Siberian winter.

In the country the women gather round the points of their dark blue veils and hold them in their teeth, by which means they have a double protection for the face. The young women are beautifully formed; their faces are expressive, and their brilliant eyes are shaded by long thick lashes; but they spoil themselves very much by staining the lips and tattooing the chin and body. They walk with singular grace and freedom, and to see them carrying a pitcher or some other burden upon the proud, well-set head, is a vision to delight an artist.

In the country the Fellahs chiefly live in mud huts, and you may see them in groups and villages on the banks of the Nile.

They seldom wander beyond their small territories, living for their work, cultivating their fields with an energy and industry worthy of high praise. Yet it too often leads to nothing but an old age of poverty and misery. They are heavily taxed and oppressed, as already stated. If they have saved anything, the chances are that it will be taken from them by those in higher authority; and thus the contentment and amiability of youth, the bright and happy nature born with them, yields at last to moroseness and ill-humour.

Their old age is as clouded as their youth was sunny. Even the certainty of passing to the realms of the blessed is not a sufficient prospect to enable them to fight against the evil. The failing senses of old age remember nothing of the vividness of youth and manhood, and the powers of anticipation too often go with it.

"There's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,
When the glow of early thought declines in feeling's dull decay."

We all know the lines. It is exactly so with the poor Fellaheen, though they cannot express themselves poetically, and are certainly not philosophers. Their language and ideas are limited, but instinct reasons for them. And from their ancestors, the early Egyptians, they have inherited a sense of justice that has been steadily handed down to them from generation to generation through all the ages, and they keenly feel the measure of wrong too often dealt out to them. The changes of morals and religion, the fanaticism and superstition of Islam, have not been able to stamp out those fundamental principles, which were as solidly built up, and are as enduring, as the work of their hands—their pyramids and temples.

They are very poor at all times, these Fellaheen, but their wants are few. They have no possessions, are even without the camel, that treasure of the East. The Fellah considers himself fortunate if he owns a donkey, the docile animal he so much resembles in his own patient disposition. He scarcely ever wanders from the banks of the Nile, and you will hardly meet with him elsewhere. It has been well said that the foot of the Fellah was made to leave its impression on the alluvial soil cast up by the river; whilst the foot of the Beduin was made to tread the impressionless sand of the desert.

And here you have a comparison expressing the exact difference between the two characters.

The Beduins—those wandering Arabs—are found wherever sand is found in Egypt. They are for ever on the wing, scouring the desert, fleeing from sand-storms, out-speeding the wind; pitching their tent at sundown, raising it at sunrise; their home everywhere and anywhere: the vastness that surrounds them, the eternal silence, the boundless horizon, not without their effect in a certain grandeur and breadth of mind which often leads them into unrecorded actions of generosity and devotion. Human nature unspoiled by the constant friction of mind with mind which leads to selfishness and sin, will ever retain some of the noble traits first implanted by the Divine Author of all. The Beduin is found everywhere; in the pathless desert, on the borders of the Red Sea, surrounding Alexandria; ever the same type; he who inhabits without the walls of Cairo differing in no way from him whose tent is pitched in the remotest confines of the Sahara. The desert is his home, the camel his sustenance, and the horse, if he possesses one, his friend, to whom he is passionately attached, and for whom he would almost risk his life.

Beduin Camp.

The poor Fellah, on the other hand, knows nothing of the life of adventure, the delights of wandering, the allurements of constant change, the charm of perpetual movement.

He plods through life more like a machine, which performs the same circle of duty with each returning season, until the wheel is broken at the cistern, and the oppressed spirit is at rest.

The mud hut in which he passes his life is as primitive as everything else about him. If you look down upon it as you pass, you almost take it for a ruin long since abandoned; or entering, you shudder as you realize under what privations and possibilities human nature can exist. The walls are made of mud and straw, or of rough bricks of Nile mud, without shape or form; the roof is thatched with straw and rags, anything they can find that will suit the purpose. The interior is almost dark, for daylight can only enter through the one opening; windows are unknown; they have not arrived at that point of architectural superiority; they could not be glazed, and would only let in the cold of winter, to which the Egyptians are so susceptible. The one room is almost empty; you will find nothing but a few baskets made of matting, a few mats of the same material; a sheep-skin, a kettle, and a few wooden plates and platters.

Surrounding the opening is a circular space surrounded by mud walls, forming a sort of primitive courtyard. Here they live during the summer, with the animals, retiring into the interior to sleep, and not always even doing that.

In the centre of the yard a square pillar is placed, about five feet high, with hollows in which to deposit their small treasures. A second column with a small platform is used by the lord and master of the domicile as a sleeping apartment in hot weather. From this perch he can look down upon his surroundings monarch of all he surveys; but the "pride of possession" will scarcely be his, poor mortal, and few would envy him his privilege.

Yet it must always be remembered that their hardships are not what they would be in a different climate. How true it is—and with all reverence be it said—that God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. Under the clear, rainless skies of Egypt, the wonderful atmosphere itself is almost sufficient to sustain life; and probably the children of Israel were never in more perfect health than during that forty years' wandering in the Wilderness, when they had nothing but manna to eat, and of that only sufficient for the daily need.

The Copts come next to the Fellaheen, if not before them in point of antiquity. They are considered the more direct descendants of the ancient Egyptians, but through intermarriage have undergone greater changes.

The town-bred Copt can scarcely be in any way identified with the Fellah living on the banks of the Nile; yet both originally came from the same source. There is some doubt as to the derivation of the name, which may have been taken from Coptos, in Upper Egypt, the

chief town of the Christians until the reign of Mohammedanism, or may be simply an Arabic corruption of the Greek word signifying Egyptian.

The Copts were the only people who remained Christians when Islamism became the religion of the country. They have, however, lost all traces of the ancient race. Mixing and intermarrying with the various tribes and people who have settled in Egypt, they have lost their first identity. Their very number is uncertain, and has been

BEDUIN AT MORNING PRAYER.

stated as anything between one hundred and fifty thousand and half a million. Probably the difference between these two figures would arrive very nearly at the truth.

Even their language, one of the most ancient in the world, they have not retained, though it has not quite died out; and to the Coptic tongue is due the discovery of the key to the hieroglyphic inscriptions, with the world of information it has opened up to us.

The Copts dwell much in towns, and are not at all a wandering race. They are found very much in Upper Egypt, and especially in

the Fayoum, but in the Delta they are seldom seen. They are numerous in the ancient towns of the north, such as Coptos, Luxor, Denderah, Siut, and Akhmim; and in Cairo they number about ten thousand.

Their occupations are sedentary, and generally inclined to the mechanical or artistic. They are watchmakers and workers in gold, making much of the jewellery of the country. Most of the imitation antiquities are also theirs—not a very honest way, perhaps, of earning a living. They are clever embroiderers and weavers. Many of them are well-educated, and are largely employed as clerks and book-keepers.

Their appearance is often pleasing; they are usually a little below the middle height, as were the ancient Egyptians, and are less strongly made than the Fellaheen, or the ordinary Musulman; have small hands and feet, skulls somewhat high and narrow, and fairer skins. They have inherited the large, wide-opened, almond-shaped eye of their early ancestors, and this forms their chief beauty.

The Coptic camel-drivers of Upper Egypt resemble the Fellaheen far more than those living in Cairo, having intermarried less with foreign races. They are easily distinguished from the Arabs by their dark turbans, and dark coloured clothes. The turbans are usually blue or black, though occasionally grey or lightish brown. These dark colours were made compulsory in the days of their persecution; they are now at liberty to dress as they please, but from habit and a certain excusable pride, they keep to their traditions.

Their women veil their faces even more carefully than the Mohammedans; not only in public but in their own homes, and in presence of their nearest relatives.

The married women of the upper classes wear a black veil; the girls and women of the lower classes a white veil, like the Mohammedan women. They blacken their eyelids with kohl, and the women of humble rank tattoo their faces and hands, invariably introducing the sign of the Cross in some part of the supposed adornment.

Although these Copts are so-called Christians, it must not be supposed that their churches and ritual are in the least like our own. They possess forms and ceremonies we could neither understand nor sympathize with; and we feel almost as little at home in a Coptic church as in a Mohammedan.

The head of the church is the Patriarch elected from the monks in one of the five great Coptic monasteries in Egypt, the choice generally falling upon a monk of the Convent of St. Anthony, in the eastern desert—a convent founded by a hermit who was supposed to have been the friend and companion of St. Paul. It is the largest and oldest convent in Egypt, and its gardens are watered by a spring in which Miriam, the sister of Moses, is said to have bathed, when the children of Israel began their forty years' wandering in the Wilderness.

But, though the Copts have monks and monasteries, few of them are Roman Catholic. The Liturgy of the Church is chiefly based

upon St. Gregory and St. Basil; the priests administer the Holy Communion barefooted, a practice descended to them from past ages, and supposed to be commemorative of Moses at the Burning Bush,

GATHERING DATES.

who was commanded by God to take his shoes from off his feet, "for the ground whereon he stood was holy ground."

Their services are long and tedious. The Scriptures alone are read in the old Coptic language; everything else takes place in

Arabic. In their doctrine they recognize only the divine nature in our Saviour. To all other Christian denominations they are bitterly opposed, carrying their bigotry and hatred to an extreme point. This is partly due to their Egyptian character, the most constant and tenacious in the world. For this reason they endured all the terrible persecutions of the sixth century, and all the oppression and opprobrium of succeeding ages.

This has had the usual effect upon their moral tone; for tyranny and injustice will in time destroy the finest nature, as continual dropping wears away a stone. Through long ages they have become silent and morose, greedy of gain, without noble aspirations or generous impulses. If they are rich they are insolent and overbearing, if poor and dependent they cringe and fawn upon you to obtain a recompense. All the noble traits of the early Christians have entirely disappeared; they have lost much of their old faith, and possess very little conscience. Their one object is to acquire wealth, and in their pleasures and amusements they are coarse and sensual. For all this we may not sit in judgment upon them; their degeneracy is simply the result of cause and effect. Long treated as slaves, they have inherited the vices of slavery; truth and honour, uprightness, moral responsibility, these, of necessity, have died out.

At the same time it must be remembered that they brought many of these persecutions upon themselves in the first instance. The new masters, the Arabians, with their new religion, were intolerable to them; instead of submitting to the inevitable, they opposed the invaders, secretly and persistently conspired against them, and so ruined their own cause. They knew nothing of the virtue and power of Christian Patience.

There are, of course, many exceptions, especially amongst the educated and enlightened and the more wealthy; but the fact remains that the Copts, once wrongly despised and oppressed for their religion and high tone of thought and life, have fallen from their high estate.

In the social changes passing over the world, they may eventually recover their ancient privileges of heart and mind; where a grain of good seed remains, it may at any moment take root and spread and bear grain a hundredfold. Many of them have been converted of late to Protestantism by the American missionaries; the long-ebbing tide may begin to flow once more; the day may yet come when they will return to their early traditions. In spite of all they have been a great force and influence in the country; have left many traces and records behind them. Theirs is the language found on many of the old Egyptian walls. They were at one time rich in MSS. inscribed on cotton-paper and papyrus; and if a large number of them have not come down to us, it is due to the barbarism of the Musulmans, who in their fanaticism loved to destroy everything that was opposed to their own creed.

Prominent in interest, but rarely seen beyond his native desert, in his primitive integrity, his simple dignity, is the Beduin.

These ancient tribes, living in the desert in regions remote from civilization, from close towns and crowded habitations; pitching their tents wherever there may be a spring of water or green oasis, are surrounded by a halo of romance. We think of them as we think of no other people upon earth. In their character there is much to admire; and their free, wandering life arouses all our love of adventure. Who has not longed for a time to throw off the trammels of ordinary life and revel in the vast silence of the wilderness—its apparently boundless limits, its wonderful skies? Those who have had the smallest experience of the desert know that it gives birth to thoughts and emotions hitherto undreamed of, as new as they are overpowering and delightful.

The Beduins are a race apart, and, to some extent, a law unto themselves. They may be divided into two great groups or families, which again are subdivided into lesser tribes.

First, there are the Arabic-speaking tribes, who originally came from Arabia and Syria, and now inhabit the deserts of Central and Northern Egypt, and the regions of Southern Nubia, giving up their lives to quiet and harmless pursuits, cultivating their fields and tending their flocks.

Secondly, there are the *Bega*, found in Upper Egypt and Nubia, all the territory lying between the Nile and the Red Sea. These are Ethiopians, and are supposed to be descendants of the Blemmyes, who until the fourth century of the Christian era occupied all the Nubian portion of the Nile valley. They are divided into three separate tribes or races: the Hadendoa, the Bisharîn, and the Ababdeh.

The last are the most evident in Egypt. They are wandering and restless; have scattered and spread in the valleys, have never prospered or attempted to do so, but lead lives of miserable poverty, grasping in a small way all they can lay hands upon; depending upon their few goats and camels to keep them from absolute starvation.

These Ababdeh once possessed a language of their own, but in their scattering and wandering propensities they have for the most part lost it, and they now speak Arabic. Their dress is simple: a long white garment with a girdle round the loins, over which a tight woollen mantle is thrown in winter. The shepherds in the valleys wear nothing but a leathern apron, with a blanket thrown over the shoulders.

These Beduins are a fine race of men, with dark bronze complexions and well-formed features. The expression of the best of them is proud and fearless, with well-opened flashing eyes. The free, wandering life they lead gives them an independence of character and spirit, which their poverty has in no way destroyed. Their wants are indeed few, and they have learned to expect little. The very modesty of

their desires has probably encouraged them in their want of thrift. Where necessities are few the daily bread seems easily supplied, and ceases to be a matter for anxiety.

The free life of the desert has developed all their physical endowments. They are magnificently formed and proportioned; not too large, in accordance with their scanty nourishment, but slender and graceful and lithe of limb, swift runners, and not easily tired; have small, thin features, a clear complexion, and an eye full of intelligence. They wear a dagger in a sheath fastened above the elbow of the left arm, but their nature is gentle and not aggressive; they never use it excepting in self-defence.

Woman of Cairo.

The number of the Abebdeh Beduins is about thirty thousand.

In crossing the deserts you come much into contact with them, but you have nothing to fear from them. Government has given them the control of the route through the Nubian desert, so that they feel themselves responsible for what happens. The head of the tribe, the chief sheykh, inherits the dignity, and appoints sub-sheykhs in every village, who are responsible for law and order. They are judges and arbitrators, and their decision is final and binding.

The Beduins thoroughly despise the quieter and more industrious and oppressed Fellahs, who pass their lives in pastoral and agricultural pursuits on the banks of the Nile, sowing their seed and reaping their harvests, and, as far as they are able to do so, laying up in store for the time to come. All this the Beduins despise with a sovereign contempt. Occasionally one of them will take the daughter of a Fellah to wife, but the daughter of a Beduin is never allowed to mate with a Fellah. Yet the Fellaheen are well-conducted and well-principled, and the chastity of their women is proverbial.

The Beduins are famous for their war-dances, and when it is possible it is well to see one of their remarkable representations.

The Ababdeh tribe live in small huts and hovels, which consist

simply of stakes covered with straw mats. Occasionally they live in caves where sun and light never penetrate, though a snake will some-

A Water Seller.

times glide in with murderous intentions. They possess the faculty of *tracking* to a marvellous extent, and have pursued and hunted down

many a criminal trying to escape from public justice. Many of them live almost wholly on goats' milk, or, buying a little sorghum grain, they eat this raw, or baked into a species of thin, unleavened cake, hard and tasteless. They scarcely ever touch meat, but occasionally capture game, of which they are very fond. Those living near the sea subsist very much on the shell-fish they pick up, varied now and then with turtles' eggs, and the eggs of the sea-swallow, which are found in large quantities on the sandy islands of the Red Sea.

But in this marvellous climate, as we have already said, it is almost possible to live upon nothing. The smallest amount of food will satisfy the wants of nature, and not only keep body and soul together, but keep the body in health.

If any part of the physical organization suffers it is the intellect; the brain needs nourishment more than the body. But the cravings of hunger, such as the ill-fed inhabitants of colder climates experience, are unknown to the Beduins. It is a merciful arrangement where poverty is great, and food is scanty and often very difficult to procure. No one can realize without experience the marvellous sustaining properties of the desert air, or the healthiness of the roaming desert life; none can realize its charms. Never until you have once gone into the desert can you even faintly conceive the delight of scouring these endless, pathless wastes, where undulation after undulation meets the eye, hills and valleys seem to multiply themselves, and vast plains open up a boundless horizon. You feel that this is indeed a new life and a new world, as wonderful and magical as anything to be found in the *Arabian Nights* or the most marvellous tales of adventure ever conceived by the most fertile imagination.

The Beduins of the North are those who have most retained the traits of the ancient people, and best represent one's ideas of the impulsive and wandering Arab, scouring the desert upon his steed and living a life of wild freedom and uncertainty.

These have retained all the energy, all the fiery blood and fierceness of character of their forefathers, who fought under the banner of Mohammed, and to whom most of his victories were due. What they were then, they are now. If a new prophet were to arise, and all the wars and vicissitudes of the sixth century were repeated, these Arabs of the North would rally under the new banner, and with the cry "To death! To Paradise!" would carry all before them or perish in the attempt. Their tenacity to old traditions is without parallel, but living in deserts, not mixing with their fellow-men, not intermarrying with other tribes, the condition of their life never alters; the eternal sameness of the desert hills and plains, of the sky that overshadows them, serves them as a model of constancy, which finds its reflection in their own hearts and minds.

These men are only found if you penetrate into the desert and seek them out. If occasionally they have occasion to visit the towns, they

get through their business as quickly as possible, and return to their native haunts.

The restraint of a city is odious to them. You may now and then see one in the streets of Alexandria or the bazaars of Cairo, and you will know him by the grace and freedom of his gestures, by his upright form and fearless carriage, by his keen, straightforward eye, and the clear bronze of his complexion ; a monarch amongst men,

A Road Waterer.

with some of the bold and fearless traits of the lion about him, who is also a monarch in his own dominions.

But the Beduin is quiet, reasonable, never seeking to disturb the peace of the community, and above all, never taking a mean advantage or trying to get the better of his neighbour. Those Beduins at the foot of the Pyramids, who perhaps once belonged to the nobler race, are no longer worthy of their traditions. They have mixed and intermarried with others ; have ceased to be honest and fearless ; a love

of gain is their leading characteristic; *backsheesh* is the keynote of their life; they are Beduin in nothing but the name.

The Arabs dwelling in the towns are a very mixed race, and they are found in all classes of the community; amongst the shopkeepers, the officials, the servants, and the donkey boys. They have grown indolent, frightfully greedy of gain, ravenous for backsheesh, not satisfied unless they have pillaged you to the utmost of their power; telling you the most palpable and barefaced untruths to gain their ends, scarcely caring to conceal their cunning and duplicity. Too often your dragoman is in league with them, and then you are at their mercy.

Their religion has partly helped to develop this temperament, and encourages them in defrauding the stranger; this quiets their conscience, and makes them feel themselves partly in the right, so that they assume a straightforward air of candour which may easily be mistaken for honesty and uprightness. Very little of the true and original Arab remains. You will find the inhabitants of the towns of every complexion from white to black, and of every cast of feature from the large, almond-shaped eye of the Egyptian to the well-defined profile of the Beduin; here you encounter the stout, gross figure of the Turk, side by side with the slender proportions of the Fellah and the Copt.

These dwellers in the towns are slow and deliberate in all their actions, taking an abundance of time over their work, never hurrying themselves, thinking they can do to-morrow what has been left undone to-day. They are thorough in nothing. Fatalism is a part of their creed, and influences them almost as it influences the Turk; yet not quite as strongly, for he, upon this same principle of fatalism, allows everything about him to go to ruin.

There is a dreaminess about them that is thoroughly Oriental. I have talked to one who seemed under the influence of some powerful narcotic, about to fall into unconsciousness; yet a remark, a turn in the conversation, has suddenly roused him into full life and energy and activity, the dreamy eyes have flashed with intelligence, he has seemed in full possession of very acute senses, to fall back a few moments after into his dreamy condition. There is often a gentleness, almost a womanliness about them, very appealing to one's sympathies, making you feel as if you were talking to grown-up children, who needed care and protection.

Besides these people there are the Jews, the Turks, the Levantines, and the Europeans to complete the population of the Lotus-Land.

The Jews take precedence of the Turks in point of religion, the Turks come first in political importance; not that they now possess much real power. They have never been great in numbers, and the present Turkish population of Egypt is said scarcely to exceed ten thousand. It is more or less a floating population, wandering and transitory. They keep themselves very much apart, and despise the

rest of the various tribes or people of Egypt. Their power virtually came to an end when they were conquered by the Mamelukes, and they are never likely to regain any real influence. They are a prosperous section of the population, and are chiefly occupied in mercantile pursuits. In past days, when the political power was in their hands, they terribly mismanaged the country, and reduced it to a condition from which it has scarcely recovered. They are a handsome and dignified race.

A Nubian Woman.

The Jews for the most part live in Cairo, in a dirty and miserable quarter. They are slovenly in their habits, but many are rich and prosperous. Though despised, they are not persecuted. Many of them are of very different type from the Jews in Europe; frequently have red hair, are fair, with blue eyes and light complexions. The colour of their turbans is the same as that worn by the Copts. The women veil themselves, and dress exactly as the Coptic women, which closely resembles the ordinary Mohammedan costume.

That the Jews are despised and set apart is chiefly due to their miserable manner of living and their neglect of the laws of cleanliness —an unpardonable sin to the followers of the False Prophet.

The Armenians are a superior and more prosperous race, and a more popular. They are intelligent and well educated, and are excellent linguists. Many of them are wealthy, and, in consequence of their abilities, not a few are employed in Government offices.

The Levantines are a mixed race.

The term is generally applied to all the Arabian Christians of Syrian origin. It is also frequently applied to all those persons of European origin who are born in the East. Many of them have settled in Egypt for generations, and have intermarried with some of the oldest Egyptian families. Those of more recent date consist of Syrians, Armenians, and Greeks. Not a few of them are rich, and are chiefly bankers or merchants. They are Christians, but in their domestic life adopt many of the customs and habits of the Musulman. Like the Armenians they are excellent linguists, and are well educated. Amongst themselves they have a language which is a mixture of many dialects, but they profess to speak Arabic. They have made themselves a prominent and important element in the country.

Next, and finally, come the Europeans, who are very numerous, and are composed of all nations. They are scattered over all the towns of Egypt, but are chiefly found in Alexandria and Cairo.

A very large proportion of them are Greeks; next in number are the Italians; the remainder are French, English, and German, with a few Russians and Scandinavians.

The Greeks and the Maltese are the most unruly element in the country, and are said to commit nearly all the crimes which fill the prisons. Egypt would gain if the Maltese element were altogether absent. In their own small island they are kept in check by the influence and wholesome fear of the English; but in Egypt, where they are outside control, they give way to their natural character, and become insubordinate, cunning, and frequently criminal—breaking the honest laws of the land and paying the penalty.

The Greeks are enterprising and pushing, have more intelligence than the Egyptians, more daring; and this from want of principle, frequently leads them also into mischief. They are the rich people of Alexandria; monopolize a great part of the commerce, live in the finest houses, drive the most showy equipages. These are the commercial aristocracy of the place; and, to a limited extent, are to the modern city what the Greeks were to the ancient.

The classic days of Alexander, the Ptolemies, and Cleopatra are over; the picturesqueness, the glory, the greatness and grandeur, the voluptuousness and the unlicensed revelry—all this has disappeared. In place there reigns a commonplace element, in which is found nothing of the beautiful and picturesque, but more of the wholesome,

more of the law-observing; a condition of things that possibly may last to the end of time. The world is consolidating into forms, manners, and ideas which are the outcome of progress and science. These will govern the future world, not men's whims and fancies. The time is fast disappearing when one country will rule as supreme mistress above all other nations. The result of a battle is now settled by an indemnity, not by a change of dynasty for the conquered.

A Beduin.

It is better so. Wars will probably last as long as the world itself; it has even been demonstrated that they are a positive good; a necessity, and not a necessary evil. If this be true we may well wish for the day when this present dispensation shall give place to a millennium of harmony, in which the lion shall lie down with the lamb, and Divine mercy shall remove the curse that has lain so long upon the world.

No country has gone through greater changes and vicissitudes than Egypt; yet, as long as the Nile overflows, so long will she seem to retain her vitality. Like the Phœnix of her ancient people, the

centuries roll on and she rises from her ashes with renewed vigour and life and youth. We have seen how mixed is her population, of what various elements it is composed, how puzzling all these tribes and sects are to the unfamiliar visitor; but every different section fills its niche more or less necessarily, more or less worthily; the numerous elements form a not inharmonious whole, upon which shine the clear skies of our Lotus-Land by day, whilst night after night there comes down upon a sleeping world the benediction of the stars—a peace and serenity only broken by the voice of the muezzin ringing clear and distinct through the darkness, sounding from the minarets like a voice from Paradise calling the faithful to prayer.

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And now our task of many months is ended. We have trespassed, we fear, far too much upon the reader's patience, in lingering so long amongst the antiquities of the Lotus-Land, and treading in the footsteps of the past. But it is impossible for the traveller in Egypt to perfectly enjoy and realize what meets his vision at every moment of his progress, without knowing something of the history of the country—its laws and customs, its ancient religion, its hieroglyphics, its mystic symbols, its art and architecture, its various tribes and races; how they came into existence, how they flourished and passed away: times and people and places which take us back to those remote and mysterious ages, compared with which the days of Abraham seem but as yesterday.

For this reason we have ventured to give a very brief and imperfect outline of this most ancient, most interesting land of tombs and temples, of ruined cities, and antiquarian remains. We may now return to our own personal experiences, and endeavour to place before the reader, if he can still accord us a little indulgence and attention, some of the scenes which so greatly interested ourselves, and remain as vivid and unfading pictures in the memory. No one, indeed, can visit this classic ground, teeming with traces and memorials of remotest antiquity; no one can breathe that rarefied air and gaze upon those blue ethereal skies, or trace the windings of the matchless Nile, without experiencing an emotion no other country will yield, a delight as rare as it is profound. The Lotus-Land appeals alike to the antiquarian, the historian, the philologist, the Biblical student, and the philosopher. It has been singularly favoured. If to Bethlehem was given the honour of seeing the birth of the Saviour, to Egypt was given the honour of protecting Him from the wrath of Herod. From the moment the command was given: "Arise and take the young Child into Egypt," a new and separate interest fell upon this wonderful country; an interest never to be removed until that day when the fields being ripe for harvest, the reapers put in their sickle, and the light of ETERNITY shall dawn upon a new heaven and a new earth, where death and evil, sorrow and pain, all the mystery and sadness of this mortal life, shall not enter in; for "the former things are passed away."

WHEN THE CENTURY WAS YOUNG.

I.

IN the latter years of her life Miss Morris lived at the small seaport of Aberderry, and now and then took lodgers. She was comfortably off, and had small need of swelling her income by these means, but she did so chiefly as an accommodation to the large circle of friends, both in her own grade and a higher, by all of whom alike she was looked up to and respected.

Her late father was the last representative of what had been a long established family of substantial landowners, from whose hands their lands had passed farm by farm away, leaving him only the owner of one farm, which had once been the centre of a good estate. This farm lay in near proximity to Powys Court, and Mr. Powys, of whom mention will presently be made, had much partiality for this old neighbour of his, who had seen better days, and whose lands, and those of his forefathers, were nearly all incorporated in the Powys estates. To Miss Morris herself this regard had been the more warmly extended that she had been foster-sister to one of the young ladies of the family. With that much-loved family she had suffered and rejoiced, and although not, of course, on a social equality with them, she had been held by them in high affection and esteem. She had received such education as the remote district in which she lived afforded, and this had been to some extent supplemented by her companionship with Miss Lucie. The stamp of refined influences was unmistakably on her, while of the larger education given by a varied experience working on a good heart, she had, perhaps, more than any one I ever knew.

When we were in quarantine from the measles, in her lodgings, last year, she would often tell us stories of days when the country was wilder and more lawless than it now is, and this that I give, as far as I can remember it, in her own words, is one of them.

When I was a young girl, said Miss Morris, times were very different from what they are now. The century and I were in our teens together, and in remote country places like Glenarthney, where I lived with my parents, little offences against the law were practised now and again without much notice being taken ; or if the worst came to the worst, it was not very difficult to find a hiding-place from justice. I do not say a word against the laws as they are now. They are, of course, very nice and proper, and where should we be without them? But in those days they were very hard in some cases, especially on the poor, and if the more humane among the gentry were content sometimes, instead of prosecuting at the first offence, to send warnings to the culprit: not direct, of course, but con-

veyed through trustworthy agents, in some way or other: I think it was very much to their credit. If they thought a little less of the guilt it was because they considered the temptation more, and that seems only like the mercy taught us in the Gospel. If, where the offence was small and the punishment great, they gave people something more than one chance, it was, I think, the best justice in the sight of God. Now, you must not suppose from this that Glenarthney was full of bad people. It was just the other way. The poor rates were low and there was little crime. Half the parish belonged, as I have often told you, to Mr. Powys, and a better landlord, more active, or more beloved, was never known.

But some bad people will always be found, and there were a very wild lot in those days living in a small kind of hamlet or ravine that ran up the side of one of the hills. It was, I think, waste land, belonging to no one in particular—the Crown, perhaps—but there were plantations near full of game, and higher up it opened right on to a kind of table-land on the top of the mountain, where there was a large sheep walk. All that part is hilly country, and desolate enough to a stranger; but cottages and small tenements are scattered up and down it, half out of sight until you are close upon them; and there was a little cluster of dwellings, some scarcely better than huts, in this ravine, and two families had made a kind of little colony there—the Phillips and the Duntzes. There were farriers, and jockeys, and different trades among them, but they were very handy to the sheep-walks and game, and the saying was that although they were idle and poor, they knew the taste of mutton-chops and hare-soup as well as some of their betters did.

In fact, they really were incorrigible poachers, and smugglers as well, and the Phillips, men and women, too, were a real bad lot in a great many ways—dishonesty, and what not; and Mr. Powys thought very ill of them, and tried to get rid of them from the parish, only they were cunning as well as bold. On the other hand, he always said the Duntzes had good stuff in them. If they once gave their word it was to be trusted; they were brave and less cringing than those others; they were good to one another and to any one else who would let them alone, and it seemed they had a great attachment to that wild spot among the Welsh hills. Some said there was good blood in them, however they came by it, but I know nothing of that; it was an old story before my time, and although Duntze is an English, or rather foreign, name, they were Welsh in everything besides.

Now, when I was quite a little child, two of these men, one from each family, were taken up for sheep-stealing, and sentenced to death for it, for so the law then was, and a very shocking one it was, too. Mr. Powys took it to heart uncommonly, and worked hard to get them off. They were both men in the prime of life, little younger than himself, and he had had dealings with Will Duntze about

breaking in some horses, and had taken rather a fancy to him. Then he was always very much against that law, and I have heard him say, many is the time—

"When a man is half-starved on a cold winter's night, and more than half sick at hearing his children cry for food, and a sheep strays to his door, or a hare crosses him in the woods as if sent by God, and he takes and kills it, if it is a crime at all, it is not a large one. Which of us who sit on the bench to judge him, never having wanted for a meal all our lives, can honestly say we would not have done it if we found ourselves in his place?"

Well, they had pleaded "Not Guilty" from the first; whether they were or not, I cannot tell, and there were extenuating circumstances in their favour. Mr. Powys and others left no stone unturned to help them, and so at last they got the sentence changed into transportation for life, and that was hard enough for them, I think. They were sent to Botany Bay, and every one supposed that they had heard the last of them; but when some fifteen or sixteen years had gone by, there began to be some talk in the country that Will Duntze had escaped from the settlement and was come home.

Fifteen years makes an alteration in every one, but of course the older people remembered him well, and, although he kept very close at first, one saw him, then another, and they said there was no doubt about it, only he was dressed up as a woman and never was to be met with except in the hills and lanes about Trawsnant, as the ravine where they lived was called. It was a daring thing to venture back to the very place where he was taken, but the Duntzes *were* daring enough for anything, and this man had a wonderful love for the cottage where he was born, and for all the place, indeed, for that matter. At first he would come for a bit and go away again, but by degrees, as he found people let him alone, he stayed on and on.

"Who is this you have got living with you?" asked some one of the women of old Mary Duntze, Will's mother, one day.

"A cousin of my husband's," said she, looking at them straight as a hawk. "She is widow of an English farmer. They call her Mrs. Martin, and she gives me many a good hand's turn in the house now that my daughter is sick."

So it was Mrs. Martin she had to be, although no one believed it a bit, and somehow every one's business is no one's business, and the Duntzes had always been free-handed among their poor neighbours and were not disliked. Anyway, no one laid information against him, although the parish constable in reality knew about it as well as any one. He asked my father to find out from Mr. Powys what he had better do, and Mr. Powys said he did not believe one word of the story, and to let the poor woman alone, as she seemed doing no harm. But I think all three—I mean Mr. Powys, the constable, and my father—took great pains not to meet Mrs. Martin so as to see her face to face.

By this time I was grown up, and it was wonderful the interest I took about this Will Duntze, having heard the old story long ago and thinking it so hard upon him. I was as afraid he would be taken as if he were some relation of my own, and one night I awoke screaming, and when they came to see what was the matter, I was crying out, "Oh, the king has sent down a sheriff after poor Will Duntze, and he is hiding in our barn." Several times I happened to meet Mrs. Martin in the lanes and used to feel half-frightened when I saw her coming, but I always said "Good-morning" as friendly as I could, and she very stiff and gruff answered back.

One day I had been staying with my grandmother, at Trecelyn, and was to go home about noon. My uncle was constable there. I did not care for him much, for he was a hard man, very different from my father; but they were all good to my grandmother and told her everything, and often asked her advice, for she was a very wise woman, and they talked before me as before one of themselves.

That morning he told her of an expedition he and some others had to go, which they were keeping secret. Some smuggled goods had been brought up the country and they had a search warrant to go to several places after them, and to some of the cottages in Trawsnant among others.

"If I go," said my uncle, "I'll just have a look at her they call Mrs. Martin. I am much mistaken if I shall not see an old acquaintance there, whose right place is over the water. They are not half sharp at Glenarthney."

It was a fine morning in April, and instead of going home by the high road I went a shorter cut over the hills. The road was bad enough in some parts, with a brook to ford, over which there was only a little wooden bridge for foot passengers; but I liked going this way, for it was sheltered in winter and shady and pretty in summer. It was lonely, however, by night, as there were few cottages and only one farmhouse by the roadside; but in the daytime the men were working in the fields and there were plenty passing by.

The brook came straight down from the hamlet of Trawsnant, and was the loneliest part of all. The hedges in the sunshine were covered with primroses, and I took the pony I was riding (it was all riding in those days except for the real gentry) close to them, and gathered a bunch to take to my dear Miss Lucie, my foster sister, who was ill on her sofa then, and for a long while after. All the time I was thinking of Will Duntze, feeling grieved and frightened for his danger, although I had not dared to say a word to my uncle. Whatever his crime had been, he had had severe punishment for it, and as long as he was so much for his old home among the mountains, it seemed hard upon him to be hunted down even there, like a wild creature. The road now went along under the plantation by Trawsnant, and just as I was coming to the brook who should be there but Mrs. Martin.

The Duntzes' cottage was high up in the ravine, but most likely she was doing a day's work at some of the neighbour's houses lower down. She was carrying two pitchers to fill at the brook. She was very tall and straight, and dressed in the Welsh dress like the other people, except that she had a handkerchief about her head and under her chin, and an old bonnet perched upon the top of that, coming down over her forehead. Her eyes were deep set and handsome, looking at one very stern and keen from under her thick eyebrows and broad forehead; that is if she chose to look at all, but passing most people she would keep her eyes down, and to be sure they were uncommonly like old Mary Duntze's! Large and rather handsome her other features were.

I came upon her rather of a sudden, and almost without knowing to myself something made me stop the pony.

"Good morning," said I, in Welsh, "will you be good enough to dip this handkerchief in the water for me. I want to keep the flowers fresh."

She took it very stiffly, without saying a word, and I had just one minute to think while she rinsed it out.

"If what I am going to do is wrong in the sight of man," I thought to myself, "I think the Almighty will forgive me."

"The flowers are for Miss Lucie Powys," I said, aloud; "she likes to have them, poor young lady, now when she is ill."

"I have heard tell of her," said Mrs. Martin shortly.

When I had thanked her and was winding the handkerchief round the primroses, which, indeed, were not drooping at all, she took up her pitcher and began to move off.

"I am coming from Trecelyn," I said, then, "and something I heard whispered there makes me think some of the preventive men and others mean to pay Trawsnant up there a visit to-night."

I can see now the tall figure holding a pitcher in each hand as she turned slowly and seemed to look through my very soul while she spoke.

"After what are they going there?" she said, in a hard, stern voice, like a justice on the bench.

"They say there are smuggled goods there, and—well—and other things besides. Perhaps I am wrong to speak of it, if any there have been doing what is bad," I said, wondering all the while how I dared to be so bold.

"Not more bad, perhaps, than those who go there after them," said Mrs. Martin, full of defiance for a minute, then quite quiet again. "Well, if there is any truth in the story it will be seen to-night," and scarcely answering my "Good-morning," she turned on her way, taking care, however, to show she was not in any hurry.

II.

I DID not dare to tell any one what I had done, and although I could not be sorry for it, I was uncomfortable enough for the next few days, and very anxious to hear whether the preventive men had really come. We soon knew all about it. They had gone to Trawsnant, as they intended, and searched for the goods, but found nothing. There was no trouble about it at all. The Trawsnant men were found quietly at home, and by their being so willing to be searched, the constables and all thought they must know well in reality that the goods were safe in some other hiding-place. Nothing could be brought home to them whatever. My uncle asked particularly to see Mrs. Martin, but she had gone that morning, they said, to her other relations in North Wales, so there was an end of that.

All through both harvests Mrs. Martin was absent, and I was beginning to be afraid she had been fairly driven away, when one day I was going a long walk by Trawsnant and passed her on the road. There was a footpath on the plantation side higher than the road, and generally much cleaner, where I was walking, and she was below, so we only said "Good morning." She did not look straight at me, and, indeed, I felt rather guilty myself, for it seemed as if we had a secret between us, which some would not think quite creditable. I was glad, however, that she must know the information I had given her was true.

My mother had sent me a message to Capelly, a farm on the roadside, about a mile beyond Trawsnant, and when I was coming back I saw Mrs. Martin leaning over some bars going into the plantation. I guessed at once she was waiting for me. She had a few small branches in her hand of the mountain ash with beautiful red berries, and she held them to me.

"Here," she said, "if you like to take these things home to the young lady who is ill; some folks think this sort handsome; I know nothing of such things myself."

I took them and thanked her kindly, saying, what was true, that Miss Lucie would think them fine. She was half turned, but said over her shoulder, looking at me steadily from under her thick eyebrows:

"There are plenty of nuts in an old hedge about fifty yards off this way"—pointing to the right; "it is too far for the children of the village to come, and likely enough they don't know of them; but they are easy to reach if you like to come and gather them some day."

I said, "I'll come there the first morning I've got time, and thank you for telling me."

"There are blackberries there, too," was her only answer as she walked off.

You may think me very foolish but indeed the tears were in my

eyes as I turned away, and I thought her face looked older and more haggard than when last we met, and her eyes more hollow. I did not forget to thank her for the nuts, you may be sure; and after that I felt somehow that we were friends; not that the nuts, of course, belonged to her in any way. It was an odd kind of friendship, for we never spoke to each other except just a word or two in passing, and if any one was with me she would scarcely even say "Good day"; but a kindly look came into her face when she looked at me that quite softened it. I suppose there were not very many she had ever been able to trust. She did several little things, too, to show her good will. It was a bad winter for holly berries, for instance, but she told me she could get some, if I wanted them, from a long way off; and true enough on Christmas Eve a little boy brought me splendid branches, so that our neighbours said they were quite envious of me. A year went by and the only change in Trawsnant was that one of the Phillips came home from somewhere out of work, a real bad fellow, who had been in gaol more than once, and every one was sorry to have him back in the place.

It was about the middle of November, and I was again staying with my grandmother at Trecelyn, when one day I got a summons to attend my dear Miss Lucie. She had been taken worse suddenly, and they were very much afraid of her, although I may as well tell you at once she was mercifully spared to us that time. The doctor himself brought me the news. He had to return to visit a pressing case at Trecelyn, and as he did not expect the crisis in Miss Lucie's illness for twelve hours he would be back at Powys Court in time. The groom from there was bringing a horse to meet me, but the doctor had come on quicker to prepare me to get ready, and to give me medicine for her, which she was to take at a certain time. He was in such a hurry he could scarcely stop to give me the directions. I was in great trouble.

"Oh, I will start at once," I said, "and meet the man on the road, so as not to lose time."

"Yes, that's right. That is your best plan," he said.

I soon get some things together in a little basket with the medicine and set off, and it was only when I was out of the town, and well started on my usual road over the hills, it came of a sudden into my head, suppose the groom should be coming by the other way! I stood still for a moment. Should I go back? Then I thought, they know I always come this way, and it will save so much time if I meet him about half way, for he might not have started directly after the doctor left the Court. I determined to go on; it seemed, somehow, as if I could not turn back, the high road being quite the other end of the town, but I hoped earnestly at every bend of the road to see the groom coming.

It was about five o'clock when I set out, and the evening was dark with rain and wind, and although I had scarcely time, being so anxious, to

think how dreary it was it made it harder to proceed. I watched all along the road behind me, as much as that in front, for if the man reached the town, finding me gone, he would come and overtake me, and now I wished I had done one thing, now another, but kept on walking all the time, going back a few steps occasionally if I fancied I heard horses coming behind me. By this time the light was getting very uncertain, and I could think I saw horses in the distance many times quite plainly, but when I got near it was only a tree or shadow, or something like that. Everything I heard or saw seemed like horses, until I could not trust my own eyes and ears, and thought if they really came I might let them go past me, after all.

There were a few cottages at first, but now climbing and going down the hillside between close hedges the road was terribly lonely and I was very uneasy in my mind. It was getting dark, too, and I had barely gone half the way; under the woods it would be like midnight, and I was very much afraid to think of going by Trawsnant. Should I go back after all? I stopped still to think of it, and then I remembered, of a sudden, I could call at Capelly, and John Davies, the farmer, who lived there, would send one of the men with me the rest of the way with a lantern. This gave me a little courage to go on, of course still hoping that I might meet the groom, and what with that and with thinking I was doing no harm, and that the Lord would take care of me in the darkness and the great waters as much as in the light, I got on somehow.

Only once, rather early in the walk, a man passed me, and there was something I did not like at all in the look of him. He had a fur cap pulled down over his face, almost meeting his cravat, and he came down out of one of the side lanes quite suddenly upon me. He did not want to speak to me, however, any more than I to him, and I thought I heard him getting over the hedge after I had passed. It was just light enough when we met to see that his face was muffled up, but then the hedges got higher and the night was fast falling, and I was very glad to reach Capelly, and get inside the clean, bright kitchen where Mrs. Davies took me. Unluckily, however, every servant from the farm was away, gone to a large fair at Llanon. They might not be back for two hours or more. There was one young man left, whom they had taken on a month's trial, but he had turned out so worthless and wild he was to be sent off, although his time was not half up. Mrs. Davies did not much like his walking with me, and talked so loud about it it would have been no wonder if he had heard her from the stables. They were very anxious, however, to help me, seeing how much I wanted to get on, if only on account of having the medicine for Miss Lucie, which she must take at a certain hour, and at last John Davies settled I should ride home on one of the farm horses that was old and steady, with the young man walking at the side with a lantern. I was well accustomed to riding, even at night, so I thought I could manage it. John Davies had broken his leg not long before,

so he could not come with me himself. I think I hear him now keeping on about it.

"I go with you myself, Miss Morris, but my leg not strong. She coming, but not well enough to go so far as that yet. Look you here, Miss Morris, was James Thomas, the bone-doctor, in the market last Saturday, and he was say to your wife he got something in the bottle for me to rub in it, and he give it him by going away, and she coming wonderful now."

Of course he meant to say "my wife" instead of "your wife," but he put everything in the wrong place like that. We used all of us to like to hear old Jack Capelly, as he was called, trying to talk English; but he was very proud of it himself. His wife could not speak a word of it, although they were respectable people; but, dear me, in those days that was nothing strange.

Well, they were very kind about the horse, old Jack going himself to see to the saddling, and Mrs. Davies making me drink something hot to keep the damp out. I mounted from the horse-block in the yard, and then old Jack said—

"Shall the boy lead it through the gate, Miss Morris, and then you go comfortable?" So he wished me good night, and away we went.

III.

It was so dark I could scarcely see my hand before my face, except just where the lantern lit up; indeed that much of light seemed to make it darker everywhere else, and it rained all the time. By-and-by we came under the woods, and the servant went up on the upper path. I would rather he had stayed below, but, after Mrs. Davies' account of him, I was afraid of finding much fault. Now, however, he took to throwing the light more on me than before me, to show where we were going; and he lagged behind so much, I had more than once to stop the horse.

"Could you throw the light a little more forward, please?" I said several times; but it did not seem to do much good.

At last he gave a kind of whistle twice, not very loud, but I felt almost sure it was a signal to some one, and he stopped a good way behind me until I could not see a step of the way. Nor could the horse, I suppose, for he stood quite still, as if we were to spend the night there in the rain and darkness. I called to the young man again to come on; and, but for thinking of the medicine, I should have been very glad by this time to find myself back at the farm, for I was certain I heard men's voices whispering together.

The boy called back "Coming now," but there seemed like a dispute going on and some slight scuffling. Then he came hurrying on with the lantern. I was afraid to find fault, and he said nothing. The horse went on, and after a while we came to the opening to Trawsnant, where the brook crossed the road. Now, for the first

time, I understood why the groom had gone to fetch me the other way: the brook was swollen with the rains and was out over the banks, and not at all pleasant to cross. I had asked John Davies if the horse would know the ford, and he said he thought he would be sure to, and I had crossed it myself when it was flooded several times before; so, thinking there was to be no end to my adventures this night, I went out straight for the shallowest part, the light this time luckily falling where I wanted it.

But we had not gone two steps into the water when the old horse turned round. I suppose he thought he had had enough of it, and would go home; but I was not willing to agree to that and turned him to the ford again, urging him on with my whip; again he turned, and so he went on for several minutes, going round and round slowly, and not getting on a step.

"Oh, dear, dear!" I cried. "What shall I do? I cannot get him to take the water."

"Stop you!" said some one, getting down the bank; but the voice was not that of the servant-boy, and the light showed me the face of Mrs. Martin.

Before I well knew what she was about, she was up on the horse behind me and had taken the reins, guiding the horse to a deeper spot in the brook than I had ventured to try. What she did to the creature I do not know, but the next moment we were floundering through the water, the horse finding his way along heavily, and the roar of the flood in our ears. A long minute, and we had passed the deepest part, the roar got fainter, and we splashed through the shallower water on to the muddy road. Mrs. Martin got down from the horse, which she managed so much better than I, and I could not help remembering what a clever jockey some one was said to have been twenty years before.

"I took the lantern from that good-for-nothing fellow," she explained. "I was coming this way, and could take better care of you than a young scamp like that."

I thanked her and told her of my anxiety about Miss Lucie's illness. The rain had stopped, and by-and-by we could see some stars. I think there was a young moon somewhere behind the clouds, for it was lighter than it had been. There was an entrance from this road into a by-path through the park of Powys Court, and I determined to go straight to the house at once without waiting to go home first. Although I had been talking, Mrs. Martin had said but little; now that we were going through the open lawns, however, she cast the light of the horn lantern round us in all directions, as if to see that no one was near, and then, with her hand on the neck of the horse, said,

"You are not one to talk, I think?"

"Indeed I am not," I said, "unless there is some harm in keeping silence."

"I am going away from this place," said Mrs. Martin; "it is no use my staying here, and I wanted to tell you—that is all."

I never heard a more melancholy voice than the one in which she said those words—low, hard and husky, coming as it was from a heavy heart.

"Going away!" I said in a concerned voice, for so indeed I felt. "I am very sorry to hear that."

"It is ill with me to be going—but I have made enemies to-night in Trawsnant, and I cannot stay. All I have done is to prevent others having the chance to do wrong, but I must go all the same."

"Is there any way I can help you, or can I get Mr. Powys to do something? and if you are going away to live, have you——"

"Money?" she said, as I was hesitating. "No, I want nothing; I can always get my bread—but you have been very good to me, and I shall never forget it, nor the family that lives here." She stopped suddenly with a sigh that seemed to labour out of her very heart. Her hand let go the horse's mane. "I cannot come further," she said, "but I will watch from here that you get safely in. Say nothing of me, if you will be so good, but let them take care of the horse and lantern, and I will send that boy to fetch them."

She was turning away slowly, but I put out my hand to say good-bye, and she took it eagerly. Mrs. Martin forgot herself just then—instead of curtseying, her hand went up to her forehead and pulled a bit of her hair! For myself, I do not think I have ever grasped a hand more warmly than that of this poor convict for the first and nearly for the last time.

"God bless you wherever you go," I said; "don't forget that He will always be your friend. Oh, think of Him, sometimes!"

"The Lord cares little for such as I," she said. "Things have been against me always, and I have not the spirit to begin again that once I had. I hope, though, He will bless *you*, whatever."

"I am very sorry you are going. Can nothing be done?" I began; but Mrs. Martin disappeared into the darkness without another word. Although I was so sorrowful for Miss Lucie, her lot seemed to me, just then, dying though I thought her, less hard than that of this poor, outcast, hunted man, driven away once more from the hovel that he called a home, without a friend to go forth with him and help to cheer his lot.

When I got to the house by a back entrance, one of the housemaids opened the door.

"There for you!" she said; "it is you, Miss Morris, after all! James, the groom, has been all the way to Trecelyn to fetch you, and they told him you had started Trawsnant way, and he came every step of it and never saw a sign of you. We was frightened then, and did not know what in the world to say with Miss Lucie wanting you so badly."

The fact was that, when I was at Capelly, the groom had ridden by in the darkness.

Well, for the next few days I felt uneasy in my mind, expecting to hear that something had happened; but the only thing that came was the rumour of a strange story told by one of the gentlemen of the neighbourhood, Mr. Harries, of Llwynddu. He had intended coming home from some distance away on the very day of the fair at Llanon, and he was to bring with him certain sums of money. Now, at the fair, he got a warning message not to take the money home that night, as he valued his life, unless he did so in company with some men prepared to defend themselves against thieves. Luckily there was no occasion to run the risk, for it did quite as well to put the money in the bank at Llanon; and he stayed in the town that night, and nothing more was heard of the business. I was half inclined to think I had myself dreamt what had happened to me that night, but there was one thing to make me believe it—Mrs. Martin was gone.

It was a couple of years before we heard the rest of it. Then that young Phillip, who was so wild, was convicted for sheep stealing, and executed. He was the last in our parts to suffer before the new Act came in, and during his last days he confessed many things to the chaplain of the gaol. Amongst them was this. He and some others had a plan to lie in wait for Mr. Harries, of Llwynddu, that night of the fair at Llanon, as they knew he was expected to bring home large sums of money. Of course, they meant to rob him, and they watched for him all night on both roads. I have no doubt the man I met with his face covered was going across country to the high road in readiness, and the others stayed in the wood. The servant-boy of Capelly knew something of what was going on, and threw the light of the lantern on me to show his friends I was not the person they wanted. When they were talking together Mrs. Martin came up, and, thinking the boy was frightening me with his tricks, got very angry and took the lantern from him, and said he should not go with me any farther.

Phillip also told the chaplain that Mrs. Martin was Will Duntze. He (Will Duntze) had been against the robbery all along, but they did not know then he had sent to stop Mr. Harries coming, and he was wise to leave the place before they did, for when they found it out, they swore, if he came back, they would tell the parish constable who he was, and be even with him.

Years went by after this—about seven, I think—when one spring morning I was in the fields, a boy from Trawsnant came up to me. He said he was sent by Mrs. Martin, who had come back once more to old Mary Duntze's cottage, and was lying sick there, to ask this great favour from me to go and see her before she died.

I had no heart to refuse, and indeed there was no danger going of a morning like that, although the place had still only an indifferent name. True enough, there was Mrs. Martin lying on the bed, and

one look showed me there was mortal sickness in her face. I am sure she was glad to see me, although she said little, and the tightly closed lips looked stern, and the eyes under the shaggy eyebrows darker and more searching than ever.

She said aloud she wished to speak a few words with me alone. Old Mary Duntze (who died soon after this) was very ill in bed, too, in the other end of the cottage; but there was a neighbour taking care of them.

"Yes, yes, I'll go, Mrs. Martin, fach," she said, in a whining kind of voice, but lifting up her hands and making signs to me as if Mrs. Martin was off her head, and going only a step out of sight behind the curtain. Mrs. Martin turned her head and gave one look that I had no difficulty in understanding.

"I think you shall go outside for a while," I said. "I will stay a little with them here;" and she had to go, although she seemed very dissatisfied. I shut the door after her and came back to Mrs. Martin. She looked at me keenly.

"I think you know who I am?" she said.

"I think I do," I answered; "but no one shall hear a word about it from me."

"I know that," said Will Duntze, for we can call him so now; "you saved me once from being taken, and I never forgot it. Others, too, were very kind. Mr. Powys is a good and merciful gentleman, and did more for me at the trial than any of them. I have seen him through the hedge many times, and longed to say a word to him, only I did not dare to show myself. You can tell him that when I am gone."

"I will, indeed," I said, "and—I think you need not have been afraid."

"Perhaps not," he said, in that hard way of his, which yet in reality was not from want of feeling. There had been too much "perhaps" in his life, poor fellow; too little certainty that any one would stand his friend.

"But I have other things to say," he went on; "look, I have got money"—and he put out his hand from under the poor bed-clothes eagerly with bank notes held in it. "Take them," he said; "see, there are four of them—£40 in all. You can read and see that they are right. If I keep them here, they will steal them from me, every one, and my poor old mother is too far gone to have them now. I shall not last many hours, I think; but I should like her to be in comfort till she dies, and then let us be buried together decently in the churchyard, for we came of good people once. Ask Mr. Powys from me not to let them take me anywhere else to bury me; they will let it alone with a word from him—mind to say, too, I did not forget all he did at the trial. I could have taken the game in his woods often since then—I had plenty of chances; but I never touched anything of his, never once, after he had been so kind to me. After that,

use the money—what remains of it—for yourself, in any way you like. Don't think to give any of it to the people here—they would only spend it in evil ways; and indeed you need not be afraid to use it; it is all honestly come by. I worked for a long time with a drover in the north of England, and I might have got on well at last but for my health; I have gone through many hardships, and led a rough life of it all along, and so my health has been getting worse and worse for years, and when I felt I could not last much longer I came back here straight again; it seemed as if I could not die away from Trawsnant and my old mother. She was always good to me, and shared with me when I had nothing; and if she did not teach me better, it was as good as she knew herself. Of course, I have sent her money from time to time, and now you will take care of her with the bank notes; but I should like too," he added, "if she could have known about them." He had to stop, from weakness, many times in saying this, I talking in between; and now he said, quite shortly, after another pause, "I think I shall be dead before the morning."

I spoke of the chance of his recovery, and asked if I should bring a doctor; but there was no doctor nearer than Trecelyn, and I think we both felt it would be no use. He was sinking fast. Then I spoke a little of death and of our merciful Saviour and His forgiveness.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I am hoping about that; but I have not been one of those to go to church and hear the Bible read. I do not know how it will be. It has been hard upon me here—it will be harder upon me there, perhaps."

Then, in answer to what I said to comfort him,

"I had not many good chances," he went on, "and I was not bad like some of them—always meaning to do mischief. I minded my own business, but they were a bad lot. I was young, and they led me to do many things. I was never afraid of Mr. Powys—I cannot think why, for he was a magistrate; and if I could only have been put under-gamekeeper or something to him when I grew to be a young man, I might have done very well; but I am afraid God will be harder upon me than Mr. Powys."

"No, never that," I said. "God is too merciful for that, and the Bible tells us that He will not refuse pardon to any one who is sincerely sorry for what he has done wrong. Christ forgave His friends who had deserted Him, and—and the worst sinners, much worse than you have been" (somehow I did not like to name the thief on the cross to him, poor fellow), "if only they were sorry."

"I am sorry," said Will Duntze, in a husky voice.

I do not remember now what else he said, but he was very good about everything, and I cannot help thinking many who pass for very respectable here will come off worse in the world to come than he who had so much punishment in this life. I think what I said was a comfort to him, and when at last I came away he held my hand in a long grip, looking at me as steadily as ever for all the death pallor on

his face. As I turned at the door, I met his eyes once more following me, still with a strange, almost tender look in them, so large and understanding as they were. The tears were in my own, and I hoped it was not the last time I should see him; but he died that night at twelve o'clock—very quietly, they said.

Of course we did with his money all that he wished, and he was respectably buried in the parish churchyard. I went to his funeral, and we sang a Welsh hymn as we came down the hill taking him to his last resting-place on earth. The rest of the money was laid out wisely and to good purpose.

I asked to see Mr. Powys the day after Will Duntze died, and he took me to the library, where I told him about all this from beginning to end, winding up by saying I hoped he would not be very angry with me. Being always so much with Miss Lucie and up at the Court, I was used to speaking quite easily to him. I can see him now, looking at me with his benevolent smile.

"No, not very angry, Mary," he said. "I am glad you were able to give the poor fellow some comfort at the last. I never heard anything against him of which I thought much harm, except, of course, about that sheep; and, even supposing he was guilty, the punishment he suffered was about enough for that. But, all the same, you had better not be taking up with any more of those folks at Trawsnant, or you may be getting us all into trouble one of these days."

He and other gentlemen, however, set to work about the place soon after, and a few good cottages were built and old ones pulled down. Some of the worst people were got off somehow, and the rest were reformed and frightened into better behaviour when they were more watched. For years, now, Trawsnant has been as quiet and respectable as any other part of the parish, and a very different school to learn in from what it was in the days when poor Will Duntze was young.

THAT EVENSONG OF LONG AGO.

The lowly, fervent prayers were said,
The sweet, heart-filling hymns were done,
And, down the aisle with solemn tread,
The worshippers passed one by one.
But, in the twilight calm we stayed
With others scattered far and few,
To hear the organ-measures played,
As eager loving listeners do.

The sacred lights burned dim and low,
And through the silence rose a strain
In which we scarcely seemed to know
The master key—joy, hope or pain.
At last the mournful minor, trilled
Down through the quaint old Gothic aisle,
Our souls with holy rapture filled,
And touched with heaven thy radiant smile.

Entranced, I gazed into thine eyes,
And on thy fair transfigured face,
As if, by some divine surprise,
I sat within God's holy place.
And, as the rich strains came and went,
I somehow felt thy soul and mine
Were in one love for ever blent,
Pure, precious, constant, and divine.

When out we went into the night
All faded were eve's crimson bars;
But in our hearts there burned love's light
That shall outlive heaven's shining stars.
We saw the church's blazoned panes
All decked with crowns, and spears and shields
We heard the fading organ-strains,
Then wandered home by moonlit fields.

And then I took that rapturous kiss
Which heavenwards turned my wavering fate,
And sealed for us our life-long bliss,
Beside the quaint old manor gate.
Dear organ-strains! dear old church aisle!
Say, who can blame me, love, if I
Still bless, with silent, grateful smile,
That Evensong so long gone by?

ALEXANDER LAMONT.

A VOYAGE ACROSS THE WORLD.

By E. C. Kitton.

"VERY comfortable-looking poverty, I must say, Georgie," said Geoffrey Martin, looking round the little room approvingly. Certainly the dainty furniture and hangings and the blazing fire were worthy of approval.

"I quite agree with you, Geoff," answered Georgie from her low chair, where she sat with her slippered feet on the fender. "At first we found several drawbacks, but now that we have got used to making our own beds and cooking our own dinners, we rather enjoy life than not. Of course there are heaps of things that we miss, and it was pleasanter to have servants to wait upon us than to have a woman in every morning to 'do up' the rooms; but we are too busy to have leisure to pine. I teach the young ladies of the town to play the piano, and to speak their native tongue with accuracy; and Josie is daily companion to an invalid lady—hours from ten to eight, and a holiday on Sunday. We rather like it."

"But Anna would not bend her shoulders to the yoke!"

"No; Anna thought poverty in England very objectionable. So she wrote to James that she had changed her mind with regard to going out to be married, and should sail for Melbourne in the next steamer. We wanted her to wait for an answer from him, but she had a more perfect faith in him than we had, I suppose; any way, she is gone."

"Have you heard of her arrival yet?"

"Yes, and no. We have heard that the *Petrel* arrived safely, but we could hardly have a letter from her till this week. It is just about three months since she sailed."

"Let us hope that her letter will not bring the announcement of her marriage to somebody else upon the voyage. It would be too bad if she broke poor old Jamie's heart, and those things do happen."

"So do snowflakes in May. No, I am not going to waste much anticipatory sympathy over Jamie's heart. I am anxious to hear from Anna though, and so is Josie. That young woman is late to-night, and I am dying to see her surprise when she finds you here."

"She is due, is she?" said Geoffrey, walking to the window and pulling aside the blind that he might look out on the garden path, dimly lighted by the gas lamps on the road. "Does she walk or drive? There is a cab now coming along."

"Walk, of course! We cannot afford carriages!"

"The cab is coming here, nevertheless. Stops at the gate—somebody gets out; it is Josie, or Anna!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Georgie, starting up in such haste that her chair went one way and the fire-irons another. "Oh, Geoff, what is it? I am so glad you are here!"

"I am glad you are glad," he returned grimly. "There, you see, if it is not Anna I am a Dutchman."

"And if it is Anna it is her heart that is broken and not Jem's," cried Georgie, rushing from the window to the front door. "Oh, my poor, poor dear!" she went on as she flung it open and caught the new comer in her arms. "What is it all, and how came you to be back again?"

"I am so tired, Georgie! I cannot talk," answered Anna wearily. "All my luggage is out there."

"Geoff shall see to that. Come right in, darling. You shall rest and tell us all the tale to-morrow."

Rest was just what the wayfarer wanted. She drank her hot brandy-and-water, and took her soup in Georgie's lately vacated chair and was after that only too thankfully led away to bed. Her sister undressed her and settled her with all love and tenderness amongst the pillows without permitting a word of explanation, and then ran down again to Geoff and Josie.

"I call this a horrid surprise!" she said. "I always did hate surprises; they are no better than practical jokes. What do you think of Jamie now?"

"Perhaps the poor fellow is dead," suggested Geoffrey.

"Not he; naught never comes to harm," said Josie spitefully. "The best I can hope for him is that he is ruined."

"Well, heaven be thanked that whatever has come to him we have Anna back safe. She looks horribly ill. Geoff, you will come in to-morrow to hear all there is to hear about it?" For Geoff was evidently ready to depart.

"I shall be in first thing, of course. I would stop if I might, but it won't do to scandalize your pupils. If there is anything to be done you will fetch me directly?"

"I am so glad you are here!" said Georgie again.

Poor Anna! her tale was told in few words, but those few words contained a volume of sorrow. Her outward voyage had been prosperous and exceedingly pleasant. She was leaving poverty behind her, and was about to meet the man to whom her whole heart was given, and who had, as she knew, made a comfortable living for himself; she was strong and well and light-hearted, and all on board the vessel conspired to court and flatter her. She might have chosen a husband from amongst half-a-dozen men, but it was Jamie she wanted and Jamie to whom she was going. All through the voyage she pictured his delight when he should rush on board the *Petrel* to welcome her, but the *Petrel* arrived and there was no Jamie. Nor the

next day, nor the next day; she settled herself in an hotel, wrote to him and waited.

After three days' waiting, a lady was ushered into her room—a lady most distinctly of the strong-minded genus. Not a bad-looking woman, Anna thought to herself as the two stood watchfully regarding one another; not bad-looking, nor vulgar, nor quite a lady, nor just at this moment quite at her ease.

"You are Miss Edgar, aren't you?" she said, after that pause of inspection. "It is rather awkward for us, you see. I am Mrs. Barrington—you won't take it kindly, I am afraid—but Jem would not come himself, he would send me. Now what can we do to put things as right as they can be?"

So the delay was explained. The delighted bridegroom had not rushed to meet his bride because he was already husband to another woman. It went hard with Anna, but she was a proud woman and compelled herself to give a cold attention to the explanations that Mrs. Barrington forced upon her. As if, being betrayed, it mattered to her how the thing was done! A rescue from danger on the one side, a nursing through an illness on the other. What did it matter to the woman they had cheated? Mrs. Barrington's offers of assistance were haughtily declined, and the first steamer that left Melbourne carried Anna Edgar with it.

"Did you foresee this, Georgie, when you gave me the exact passage money in that purse 'towards the house plenishing'?"

"Don't ask home questions, darling," answered Georgie with kisses. "Lie still and get well as quickly as you can."

For Anna had been exceedingly ill upon the return voyage, and was still terribly weak and shaken. The sympathy of all the place was with her, for seeing the impossibility of keeping the disaster secret, the Edgars had decided to speak of it openly at once, and friendly gifts of all kinds came in to show the kindly feeling of the neighbours. The little house overflowed like a cornucopia with fruit and flowers.

Geoffrey hung about, ready to nurse, run errands, write letters, or do anything that could be required of him, as long as his business could spare him, and then unwillingly announced that he must go.

"You will say it is heartless of me if I suggest that it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good," he said, squeezing Georgie's hand as they sat over the twilight fire; "but you see Anna could not have done me a better turn than by coming to grief in this way. All your misfortune seem to be good luck to me. If she had not come back I should have been afraid to ask you to come to me, Georgie, darling, for you would have said you could not leave Josie. I cannot offer you anything like what you are used to or what you ought to have, but you say you do not mind being poor."

"I like it, Geoff dear," answered Georgie; "and, besides, your poverty is wealth compared with ours."

Three-and-twenty was Anna Edgar when she went out to Australia in the *Petrel*. At three-and-thirty she was Anna Edgar still, and the *Petrel* was steaming towards England with James Barrington on board.

The little house in Oxford Road had proved a cheery home during these ten years to two busy and therefore happy women. Josie had tended the invalid to the close of her pilgrimage, and now aided her young daughter in the superintendence of the household; Anna had stepped into the place that Georgie left vacant, and had become famous through the neighbourhood as a teacher of elocution. Her romantic story, instead of covering her with contempt as she expected, had brought her hosts of sympathisers and admirers. Life had prospered with the sisters, and they could now afford to work leisurely if they chose, and to keep the servant that they had once been obliged to forego.

On a day in August, Anna Edgar was taking decided holiday. Georgie and her babes had just left after one of their frequent gleeful visits, and she was resting in preparation for the next event. Her music was open on the piano, and her blotting-book on the writing-table; but her attention was wholly taken up with certain patterns of laces and silks and velvets that were spread before her. She was evidently choosing a dress or dresses for some important occasion, and she fingered one pattern after another with lingering care. Anna had always been handsome, but she was handsomer now than ten years back, and to-day, with an expression of gentle contentment upon her face, she looked particularly well. She was so entirely engrossed in the train of thought with which the silks and laces were associated, that she did not notice the sound of footsteps coming through the garden, and started when Mary ushered into the room "a gentleman to speak to you, Miss Anna." With a flush of surprise on her beautiful face, she turned to encounter her old lover James Barrington.

"There is some mistake, I think," she said, drawing herself back haughtily after the first shock of astonishment had passed. "You can scarcely have wished to see me."

"There is no mistake," answered James; "I have come across the world for that purpose. They tell me you are still Miss Edgar."

"That is perfectly correct; but I fail to see what concern it is of yours—now," she cried with emphasis.

"I have come across the world, as I said, to seek you out, and ask if you have forgiven me for what happened ten years ago, Anna. This is my only child," he said, pointing to a little girl in a mourning frock, who hung shily behind him.

Anna looked curiously at the child of the woman who had supplanted her. She bore a softened resemblance to her mother, but in her face was a strange expression indicative of Anna knew not what.

"Indeed," said Anna, and paused inquiringly.

"I have brought her with me," resumed James; "she is all I have. It is almost two years since she lost her mother."

"And you probably wish her to be educated in England. I am sorry to hear of your loss; it is a great charge to be left with so young a child to train."

Anna was aware that she spoke stiffly and indifferently, but she was still in the dark as to the meaning of the present interview, and she resented what she looked upon as an unwarrantable intrusion.

"I brought her with me because I could not do without the only creature I have belonging to me, and, besides, I want to show her to an English doctor. Anna, you do not know what my loneliness is, and how ill I can bear to be alone. I never could bear to be by myself. It was that that brought about what you must look on as my treachery towards you. You know how I urged you to come out to me, and how you would still wait till I could come to fetch you. It was too lonely, and then I met with Jessie. She told you all about it; she was good to me and I married her. Then you came out, two months too late, and it broke my heart, Anna, for it was you always that I loved."

"Hush!" exclaimed Anna, aghast, as he ended with an appeal in his voice. "This is scarcely fit talk before your wife's daughter."

"Do you not know," he said bitterly, "the child is stone deaf? The same calamity that deprived me of her mother took away her hearing. We may say what we choose before her; she only knows what we say on our fingers."

"Poor little soul!" said Anna, suddenly relenting towards the mute little figure, and taking her into her friendly arms. She understood now the strange expression that she had noticed on the child's face.

"It is a heavy trial to her and to me, and she has no mother. Anna, I have come to see if you can be won to forgive me the past and take the place now that you have always had in my heart. I am a rich man now in everything but happiness; I can give you all the luxuries you were born to, and if you do not choose to go to Australia I will sell my property there and purchase an estate where you please in England."

Anna had released the child, and now stood proudly confronting its father.

"I am exceedingly glad to hear of your prosperity; it must surpass even your expectations, and I trust that you may long enjoy it. But as I said at the beginning, you have made a mistake, your presence here is uncalled for."

"I know," said James earnestly, "that you must even yet feel sore and angry when you think of my treatment of you; but you do not realise how much I too have undergone. Jessie was a good woman, a good wife, but she was not the woman that I loved."

"More shame for you," interrupted Anna.

James put up his hand imploringly.

"You speak truly; but it was you—you always that I carried in my heart, and it is you that I have come back to seek. Anna, if you are

still angry with me, will you not have compassion on the child? Think of her helplessness, for what am I as a guardian to that little thing? Women are always tender-hearted, and the child has never offended you. Think of her need and my need, and of how I have loved you always."

"And betrayed me," said Anna; but he went on unheeding her.

"And how I love you still. Will you not yield? You are still Anna Edgar."

"I am," said she, blushing in spite of herself; "but here is Dr. Wilberforce. I had better refer you to him, for this day month I shall be Mrs. Wilberforce."

"Anna, Anna! am I too late? Have I come across the world in search of you, in vain?"

"You forget perhaps," she answered coldly, that there was a time when you led me across the world in search of *you* in vain. I loved you once; but I am only a woman, and if I were weak enough to love you still I should scarcely have courage to risk a second betrayal."

She stood before him, proud and prosperous and happy, and if she had desired revenge for her past wrongs she had it in that hour.

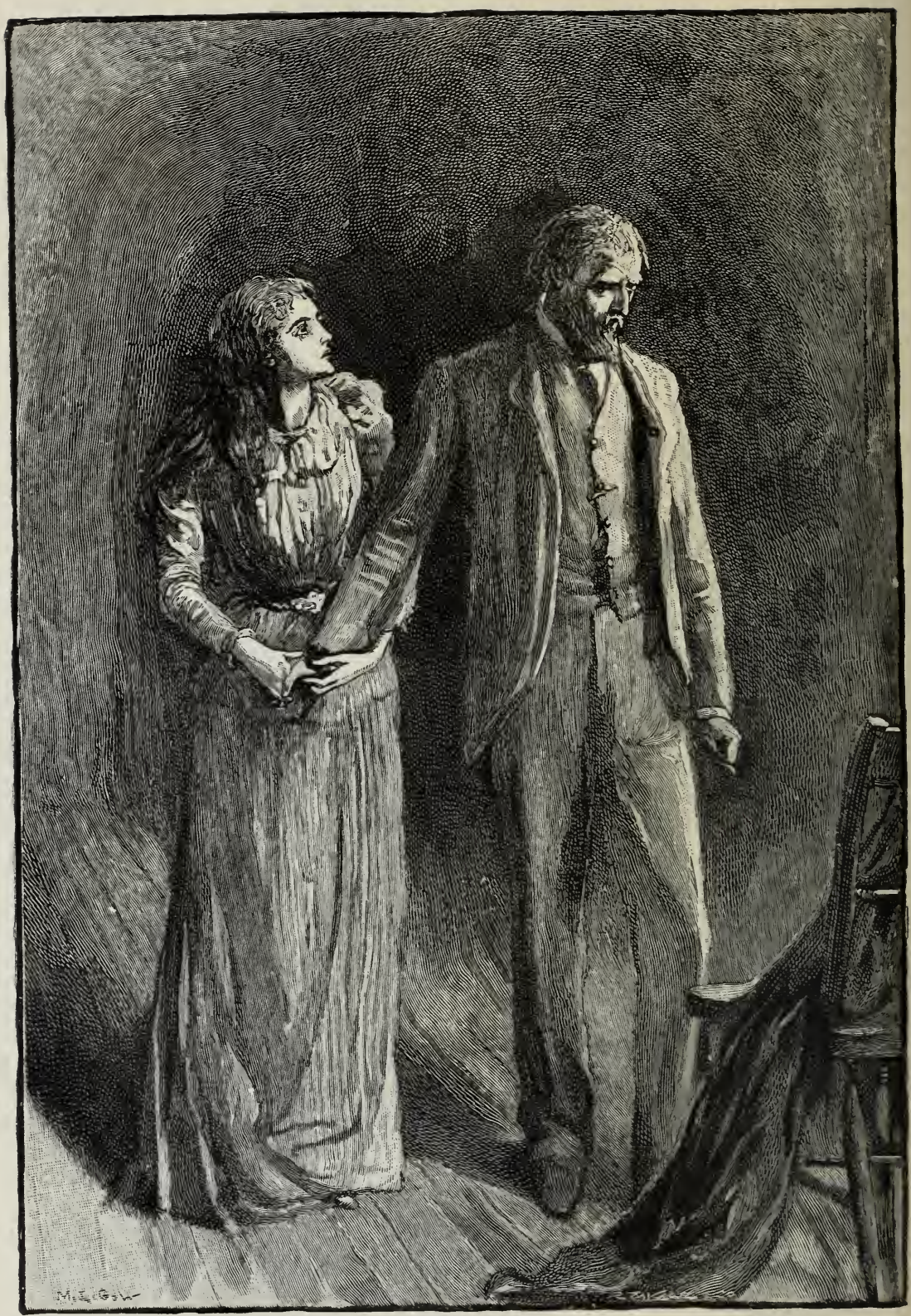
PARTED.

"The Spring is fair,
But I am broken-hearted;
Her very beauty's hard to bear
While from my dear one parted."

So to a lonely grave the mourner crept—
And saw no longer dark the earthy mound;
Straight from its sheath the flaming crocus leapt
And meeker snowdrops bent to kiss the ground.

A gleam of Heaven came softly through the gloom,
A sun-ray gemmed the tears in weeping eyes;
For Spring had written, even on the tomb,
"Resurgam"—blessed word—"I shall arise."

Sydney Grey.



SHE CAME A STEP OR TWO NEARER, AND TOOK ONE OF HIS HANDS IN BOTH HERS.

THE ARGOSY.

SEPTEMBER, 1892.

A GUILTY SILENCE.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WHAT SILAS SAID AND DID.

THE mother of Silas Ringe had been fading through the summer months, and when the cold winds of autumn set in, it was evident that she had not long to live. Esther Sarel was often with her, and to her the old woman would talk in a way that made Esther sometimes think that it did not so much matter whether one went through life as a great lady or as a poor washerwoman, if only, when the end drew near, one could await its coming as cheerfully and as hopefully as did bedridden Mrs. Ringe.

There had been some sort of an understanding between Esther and Silas that they should be married in the course of the next spring, and visit the Great Exhibition together, at which huge toy-shop Helsingham was to be represented by the sideboard carved by Silas's cunning fingers. Latterly, however, the condition of Mrs. Ringe had been such that not a word about marriage had passed between Esther and Silas for several weeks; but still Silas indulged his dream in silence of what next summer was to do for him,—it was to crown his love, and to render him famous.

Silas, on rising before daybreak one morning to go to work, went into his mother's room as usual to see how she was. She did not respond to his greeting with her customary "Good morning, lad." Silas bent over her with the candle, and saw, to his horror, that she was dead. She had died in the night, in silence and alone. Silas called in one or two neighbours, and then sat down to ponder over his loss, for he had loved his mother dearly. Of course, there was nothing now to hinder him from getting married next spring: but, to do him justice, this was a thought that just then afforded him no elation. His first intention was to go up to Irongate House in the course of the morning, and tell Esther the news; but he suddenly remembered that this was Miss Davenant's wedding-day, and that Esther was to have a new dress, and would be very busy, and full of the excitement caused by such an important event.

"Poor girl!" said Silas to himself. "Her life is not such a gay one that I should spoil her pleasure to-day by being the bearer of bad news. What I have to tell will keep till morning."

When morning came, Silas put off his visit to Irongate House till afternoon. About eleven o'clock he went into the town to make some arrangements connected with his mother's funeral. As he was crossing a narrow bye-street, he was stopped by one of his acquaintances, a man whom Silas detested, an idle, drunken fellow who was always more intent upon his neighbours' business than his own.

"Halloa! Silas," he shouted. "Thou'lt be too late to see her if thou doesn't make haste."

"Too late to see whom? I don't understand thee, Will French."

"Why, see thy sweetheart, to be sure. I thought thou was on thy way to see Esther Sarel before they took her back to prison."

"Art thou mad, or drunk, Will French?" said Silas sternly. "What nonsense is it thou art talking?"

The man stared at Silas for a minute or two.

"Dostn't thou know? Hastn't thou heard the news?" he gasped out.

"Know what? Heard what news?" said Silas impatiently.

"Why, about Esther Sarel. She's committed to the sessions for stealing a letter."

"It's a lie—an infernal lie!" said Silas savagely.

"Is it?" said Will French. "Well, then, I must have dreamed it—that's all. Why, man alive, it's hardly five minutes since I left the court-house, and heard old Bungay commit her. Little Dawkins found the thing out, and Stuffer fetched her from Irongate House last night in a cab, and she was put in quod till this morning, and now— Why, if he isn't off up the street as hard as he can tivy, pegging away with his game leg like one o'clock! Talking's dry work. A dram wouldn't come amiss."

A quarter of an hour later, Silas had heard the full details of the affair from a policeman with whom he was acquainted. All that he said when the policeman came to the end of his story was, "How can I get to see her? I must see her."

"You must get a magistrate's order," said the man in blue; "and that won't admit you till after four o'clock."

It was instinct rather than the exercise of any reasoning faculty that directed Silas towards the shop of his friend Van Nooden, the bookseller. Haggard and wild-eyed, he walked straight up to Van Nooden; it was no time for the ordinary courtesies of society.

"I want a magistrate's order to see the young woman who was committed this morning for stealing a letter," he said. "Will you get me one?"

"I will," said the bookseller promptly, who had already heard the particulars of the case. And with that he stretched forth his hand and grasped the hand of Silas; and Silas knew that the sympathy of one good man was with him in his trouble.

Silas, utterly regardless of the business respecting which he had come out this morning, slunk back home through the outskirts of the town, as though he himself were a felon, and every eye that encountered him could see the brand. On reaching home, he shut himself up in the little outhouse at the bottom of the garden, in which was the famous sideboard, now close upon completion. He sat with his face buried in his hands, almost as immovable as one of his own carvings, till the deepening dusk of the November afternoon told him that the hour for seeing Esther was come.

"No lips but her own shall condemn her," he kept saying to himself. "If all the world should believe her guilty, and she herself told me that she was not guilty, I would believe her, and make her my wife in spite of everything."

He found the order ready for him at Van Nooden's, and he walked thence to the prison like a man in a nightmare. He knocked, presented his Open Sesame, and was admitted through a little wicket, which snapped him up and shut its teeth upon him with cool indifference, as though he were hardly worth the trouble of taking in. After further jingling of keys and undoing of bolts, he found himself on the inner side of a second door, and was then ushered into a great bare, desolate-looking room, lighted with two flaring gas-jets, furnished with a deal table and benches, and having a set of chains and half-a-dozen ugly-looking blunderbusses by way of ornament over the fireplace. He had not long to wait. Presently an inner door opened, and Esther Sarel stepped into the room, followed by a thin, silent, resolute-looking woman, who placed herself with her back to the door, and so stood during the interview that followed.

They had not told Esther who it was that had come to see her, and with a wild glad cry of recognition she sprang forward to greet her lover. She sprang forward with outstretched arms, as though she would have nestled to his heart, and have rested her poor aching head on his breast, and have forgotten all her troubles in the light and warmth of his love. Knowing herself to be innocent, she forgot for the moment that Silas had nothing to guide him in the matter save her own confession to the contrary.

She was within a yard of him, she almost touched him, when something in his face, something in the rigid immobility of his figure, struck a sudden chill to her heart, so that her arms fell stricken by her side: an invisible hand seemed to be interposed between them: she fell back a step or two, whispering, "Silas!"

Only a woman's faint whisper, but with such a depth of agony in it as shook Silas as a young tree is shaken by the wind. He took a moment or two to recover himself, and as his eyes met those of Esther, the thought flashed across him that he had never seen her look so beautiful before. She was very pale, and had large dark circles under her eyes. Her hair was unbound, and fell loosely down her shoulders. But already her face was refined and spiritualized by

the fiery ordeal through which she had gone, and Silas's delicate artistic sense perceived the fact, and took intuitive note of it.

There had always been a hidden fund of sternness in the composition of the wood-carver, and he now called the whole of it to his aid to enable him to harden his heart against the influence of the pleading beautiful eyes fixed so earnestly upon him.

"Esther Sarel, how is it I find you here?" he said. He had meant to speak very sternly, but his voice had an involuntary touch of tenderness in it.

"Have you not heard, Silas? Have they not told you for what reason I was brought here?"

"I have heard; they have told me," answered Silas; "but I want to hear the story from your own lips."

"Oh, Silas, spare me!" pleaded Esther. "Indeed, indeed, I cannot bear to tell it you."

"I will spare you anything and everything," answered Silas sadly, "if you will only tell me that you are innocent."

He went a step nearer to her; he looked at her eagerly, fondly; but Esther's eyes fell before his, and she answered not a word. He waited a moment or two; then he drew himself up to his full height, and gave a great sigh, and clasped one hand very tightly over the other.

"Esther Sarel, are you innocent or guilty?"

"Innocent, Silas; innocent! How could you believe me to be anything else?"

The last word was not out of her lips before he had her in his arms and was kissing her wildly and passionately.

"Forgive me, Esther! O my darling, say that you will forgive me! They told me outside that you were guilty; that you had acknowledged yourself as guilty in open Court; but I ought to have known better than believe their lies."

He had his arms round Esther as he spoke, and was half supporting her. Her face was even paler than before, and on it there rested a faint sad smile as she listened to her lover's words.

"My poor old Silas!" she whispered; and then she made a little *moue* as she had sometimes done in the happy days that seemed a hundred years ago,—sometimes when Silas was in one of his nervous irritable moods, and she wanted to charm him back into good temper; and now, again, their lips met in a sweet lingering kiss.

Suddenly a fresh thought seemed to strike Silas. "But why are you here, Esther?" he demanded almost fiercely, as he took his arms from round her. "What right have they to lock you up, if you are innocent? Why are they keeping you in this place?"

"Because they believe me to be guilty, Silas. Because I confessed before them all that I took the letter." She felt that she was sealing her own doom in saying these words, but it was impossible any longer to hide the fact that she had acknowledged her guilt before the

magistrates. Her difficulty lay in reconciling to her lover's satisfaction the fact of her real innocence with the statement made by her in Court, and which she was still prepared to stand by at every risk.

Silas's love for her might, perchance, carry him safely through the ordeal, but the hazard was a desperate one, and the chance of success infinitesimally small.

Silas stared like one petrified. "I don't rightly understand you, Esther," he said. "Say what you said just now over again."

"I am here, Silas, because I confessed that I took the letter."

"You confessed that you took the letter! Why, only five minutes ago you told me you were innocent! What am I to believe?"

"I *am* innocent, Silas, and I want you to believe me so."

"Now I understand. You were nervous and frightened in Court, and they bullied you into saying that you took the letter; but you will tell them the truth to-morrow, and then they can't detain you any longer. Is not that so?"

"That is not so, Silas. I am innocent. I did not take the letter. I tell this to you, and to you alone. Before the world I shall abide by my false confession; and the world will believe me guilty."

"Esther, are you mad?" cried Silas, seizing her by the arm, and gazing fixedly into her eyes as if looking there for some trace of insanity. "You set before me a riddle that is hard to read."

"I am not mad," answered Esther sadly. "I was never more sane and sincere than I am at this moment. Oh, Silas! you love me, and your love has made the happiness of my life. The riddle I have set before you may be hard to read; but is not your love strong enough and deep enough to scorn the opinion of the world, even although that opinion be based on my own words, and to believe me innocent when I swear to you, and you alone, that I am so? Is not your love strong enough to do all this?"

"Esther, I detest mystery; I hate concealments of every kind, as you know; but show me your reasons, reveal to me your motives for this strange act, and then I shall know whether to applaud or condemn."

"My reasons are sacred, and cannot be told even to you, Silas. That they are all-sufficient you may well believe, otherwise you would not see me in this plight. Oh, Silas! cannot you have faith in me?"

"Faith! yes, up to a certain point. But the woman I make my wife must have no concealments from me. You must either tell me every particular of this strange affair, and allow me to judge for myself, or you and I must bid each other farewell for ever."

He spoke very sternly, and when he had ended, Esther still stood before him with downcast eyes, in a sort of proud humility, neither looking up to his face nor answering him. He waited a few moments, as if expecting her to reply; then he spoke again, more gently this time than before.

"Do you not see, Esther," he said; "cannot you understand how

impossible it is for me to take as my wife a woman who has undergone a conviction for felony? unless—mind you, I say unless—some adequate and powerful reason be furnished me, which convinces me of her innocence, and at the same time proves to me that she had no choice left her but to act as she did act. Furnish me with such adequate proof in the present case, and I will laugh to scorn the opinion of the world, and make you my wife in spite of everything!"

It was a sore temptation. She must either tell her lover everything—reveal to him who was the real culprit, and detail the reasons that had induced her to shift the guilt on to her own shoulders—or consent to lose him for ever. She was too well acquainted with Silas's disposition, not to feel sure that were he to know all, he would at once insist upon her stating the real facts of the case, and clearing herself in the eyes of the world; and that if she refused to do so, he would do so for her, in spite of anything she might say to the contrary. It was, indeed, a sore temptation. On the one hand, she saw her happy married life—home, husband, children—all that, just then, seemed to make the future worth living for, slipping bodily away from her. On the other hand, she felt that if she bought happiness at the price at which it was offered to her, it would be a happiness that would quickly turn to remorse; that she should despise herself for ever for what she had done, and that for her life would have lost its savour.

A few moments given to deep silent thought, and then her election was made. "Silas," she said very tenderly and very sadly, "what you have stated is quite true. It is not fit that you should take a woman with a prison-taint upon her as your wife. I cannot give you my reasons for acting as I have decided to act, and therefore, as you say, here we must part." She came a step or two nearer, and took one of his hands in both hers. "Silas," she went on, "we have loved each other very dearly, and it will be very, very hard to say farewell. But there are worse things than a bleeding heart; and Heaven in time will give peace to both of us. You will now be able to give yourself entirely to your carving, and a few years hence you will be a famous man. But you will think sometimes of your poor Esther, won't you, Silas? And be sure of one thing, dear, that however long you may live, you will never find any one who will love you more truly and devotedly than I have done. And now, darling, give me one last kiss, and then—farewell."

Silas's lips were working convulsively, but by a great effort he mastered his emotion, and drawing away his hand from Esther's loving grasp, he said hoarsely, "Esther Sarel, for the last time I ask you to read this riddle for me. How can you be innocent and guilty at the same time? You have just asserted to me that you did not steal the letter; will you make the same assertion in Court to-morrow?"

"I cannot, Silas. In the eyes of the world I must remain guilty."

"That will do," he said. "Not another word is needed. It is indeed fit that we should part. You have shattered the happiness of my life: let us hope that you are satisfied with your handiwork. No, touch me not!" he added, as Esther tried to take his hand again. "I have loved you and cherished you. Oh, how I have loved you! But like a viper you have turned and stung me. If I were to curse you, it would not be more than you deserve. But you will be wretched enough without that. You must go your way, and I must go mine; but never, to my dying day, will I forgive the wrong you have done me. May your heart wither up from this hour, and may you never know what it is to be loved again! Go! I hate you!"

He strode past her towards the door, at which the silent janitress was still standing.

"Silas!" A wild, shrill, agonizing cry that rang through the great bare room, and rang for many a weary day and night through the heart of him who heard it.

He turned at the door. He saw Esther's white anguished face, and clasped hands, and straining eyes; but all that he said was what he had said before. "Go! I hate you!" Then he passed out into the courtyard of the gaol, and Esther fell senseless to the ground.

Silas went home, to the home where lay his dead mother. How the next few days passed with him he never afterwards cared to recollect. Neighbours were kind, and under the double affliction that had fallen upon him, they took off his hands all the cares of the funeral, leaving him at liberty to brood in solitude over his own miserable thoughts. Then came the day of the funeral. As Silas saw his mother's coffin lowered into the grave, he said to himself, "Now I am indeed alone on earth. I wish that I lay there, silent and cold, beside her!" Then with dry eyes he turned from the grave, and went back to his lonely home. Very lonely and very desolate it looked in the chill twilight of the November afternoon, and Silas shuddered as he crossed the threshold and went in. First one neighbour, and then another, came to inquire whether he was in want of anything—whether he would not go back to tea with them; but Silas answered them out of the ghostly twilight that he needed nothing save quiet and rest, and bade each of them a kindly good-night.

By-and-by he was left quite alone. The solitude seemed to deepen inside and outside the little house, and the darkness to brood over it with darker wings. Then Silas's purpose grew strong within him. He took a bunch of keys and his hat, and went down the little garden path to the outhouse in which the sideboard was locked up. He went in, and lighted his lamp.

No eye save his own would have discerned that a few last finishing touches were still needed to complete his work; and, in truth, there was not much left to do at it. For several weeks past he had been lingering over it, elaborating, with loving, patient care, one minute point after another, till even to his fastidious taste there seemed

little left for him to alter. Every feather, every leaf, every bit of grass and weed, had been touched and retouched, so as to make the whole as close a copy of nature as the material in which he worked would admit of. The final polishing was still needed, after which it was to be exhibited in Helsingham for a few weeks, and then packed up, preparatory to being sent to London for the Great Exhibition that was to open there in the spring of the following year.

But all Silas's hopes and plans and ambitious views were changed and broken now. There had always been something unstable and crotchety about him; his mind seemed deficient in balance; he was ruled too strongly by the impulses of the moment, and was wanting in foresight and decision of purpose. The love of Esther Sarel had given an element of steadfastness to his life, had lent concentration to his ambition, and shown him a clear purpose for which to strive. That love was now broken, scattered into fragments, never to be pieced together in this world; and Silas felt like a vessel without rudder or compass, drifting helplessly he neither knew nor cared whither. All he knew was, that he wanted to be revenged on something or somebody. A sort of blind, unreasoning fury filled his heart, which must find vent somehow, or would end in his taking his own life. "What is the good of life? Is there anything worth living for?" he kept on asking himself; and his heart answered "No" to both questions. There was a strong nail behind the outhouse-door. If, now, he had only a bit of rope handy, he might end everything in a very short time. He smiled bitterly to himself as he thought thus, and putting his hand into his coat pocket, he brought out a piece of stout cord that might have been made for the very purpose.

"How long, I wonder, will they be before they find me? Not long, I hope," muttered Silas; and with that he proceeded to take off his collar and cravat. Then he glanced up at the big black nail behind the door. "No fear of its giving way with me," he thought.

The night was wild and eerie. The November wind piped shrilly through the denuded hedges, and tried the door and windows of the outhouse; and its stormy lullaby suited well with the tempest raging in Silas's heart. He was making a slip noose in the rope with nervous, eager fingers, afraid, apparently, lest his grim purpose might break down at the last moment, when he was startled by hearing the click of the gate at the opposite end of the garden. He stopped in his horrid task to listen. Next moment he heard the quick patter of little footsteps down the gravelled walk, and then some one kicking at the shut door. With a muttered execration he flung the rope out of sight under his work-bench, put on his coat, and opened the door.

The intruder was a pretty, fair-haired girl of five, the child of a near neighbour, and an especial favourite with Silas when he was

in his more amiable moods. "If oo please, Silas," she lisped out, for she spoke more as a child of three than of five, "Mammy says will oo tum and have some supper?"

Silas stood like a drunken man, and stared at the child without speaking.

"What makes oo face so white, Silas? Is it because oo mother's gone to heaven?"

With a wild exclamation, Silas stooped and seized the child in his arms, and half smothered her with kisses. "Tell thy mammy I can't come to-night, my darling. And here's a big, bright ha'penny to put in thy money-box," and he pressed half-a-crown into the child's hand as she slid to the ground.

She was hurrying off with her prize in high glee, but at the door she turned. "Sud oo like to be an angel, Silas? I sud. Dud night." Then she shut the door and went scampering up the gravel-walk, and Silas heard the click of the gate, and was again alone. He turned to the spot where he had flung his rope, and shuddered.

"I cannot do it to-night," he muttered. "That child has made me feel like a fool. To-morrow I shall be my own man again, and then I'll do it."

He sat down with a groan, and buried his face in his hands. "I can't stop here," he said. "If I do, I shall go mad. With the old woman in the churchyard, and Esther in prison— Curse her! curse her!" he cried, starting up with clenched hands and frenzied eyes. "I must get away from this place—get away at once, or else I shall take to the rope, and finish myself off."

He had reached the door of the shed and half opened it, when a fresh thought struck him. He went back to his sideboard and fell on his knees before it, and kissed it fondly a dozen times, and caressed it tenderly with his hands. "Good-bye, darling child of my brain and fingers," he said. "Good-bye for ever! Many happy hours have I spent in carving thee and fashioning thee to my fancy. And my Esther has praised thy beauty; her hands have rested lovingly on thee; her dress has touched thee. Great Heaven! let me get away from this before I am quite mad!"

Ten minutes later, Silas Ringe was on the high-road to London. He left without a word of notice or farewell to any one.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TRIX IN HER NEW HOME.

Hugh and Trix were back from their wedding tour some weeks before Margaret's marriage. The house had been freshly painted and papered during their absence; new carpets had been laid down, and sundry rooms entirely refurnished. The task of superintending

the arrangements had been intrusted to Mrs. Sutton, who was never more in her element than when looking after workmen or servants, and seeing that what was set them to do was done thoroughly. She was quite reconciled to the marriage, and had taken wonderfully to Trix, looking upon her as a promising pupil, whom it would be a pleasure to induct into all the arts and mysteries of good housewifery.

Charlotte Herne left home on a visit to some friends within a week after her introduction to Margaret and Trix at Mrs. Sutton's, and did not return till a couple of days before the bride and bridegroom were expected back. To have gone back to the old house after Trix was established there would have made Charlotte feel like an intruder; but to be there in readiness to receive her, not to welcome her, would put an entirely different complexion on the affair. During Charlotte's absence from home—she always called her cousin's house her home, even in her own thoughts—she had schooled herself as to the absolute necessity that existed for her to treat her cousin's wife with some show of affection. If she wished to remain an inmate of Hugh's house, she must make believe to find pleasure in the society of Hugh's wife.

"I will smile, and stab while I smile," said Charlotte to herself. "I think I have heard Tib read something like that, and it just suits my case. Of course she will patronize me, and still I must smile; she will pity me, and I must appear grateful; she will try to amuse me, and I must seem very much amused. And, then, their billing and cooing! I hope they won't do any of that before me, or I won't answer for the consequences. Meanwhile, I have my own little game to play, and I intend playing it to the last card."

She was very glad to get back to her old nest, and Tib and she had quite a little jubilee on the afternoon of her arrival. After tea they waltzed together in the large loft over Charlotte's rooms to airs played by the old musical box. Later on, Charlotte blew out the candles, and sat in the dark telling one ghost story after another, till Tib was half dead with fright and cold. She had never felt more thankful in her life than when Charlotte gave her leave to put on her things and go home. Just as her hand was on the door, her mistress called her back.

"You never saw a ghost, did you, Tib?" asked Charlotte.

"Law, no, miss! nor don't want to neither."

"Well, Tib, you shall have the pleasure of seeing one before six months are over."

"I hope not, miss."

"I tell you, you shall. I shall be dead in less than that time, and I mean to haunt you. I shall come and wake you up in the middle of the night, and—Ha! ha! ha! Why, if the little fool wasn't too frightened to stop and hear more!"

No one who saw Charlotte two days later, waiting, in conjunction with Mrs. Sutton, the return of Hugh and his wife, would have believed her capable of such elfish tricks. She had on a Quaker-like dress of grey silk, with collar and cuffs of plain white linen; her

ashen-grey hair was brushed and combed as faultlessly as it always was; her beautiful eyes, not altogether sightless now, seemed full of melancholy meaning, while on her face there rested that expression of child-like simplicity and want of guile of which mention has been made before, and which she seemed able to put on at will.

She was perched in an easy-chair near the fire, her crochet-work in her fingers, in a very silent and abstracted mood; forming, in this latter respect, a complete antithesis to Mrs. Sutton, who was fast becoming as nervous and fidgety as any one well could be who had still some grains of good temper left in reserve, not to speak of a best cap in a little bandbox close by, ready to be slipped on the moment a cab was heard to stop at the door. Would they arrive before the dinner was done to rags? was the great question that troubled Mrs. Sutton's mind. Happily, they arrived just as it was done to a turn; just as the short autumn day was fading into dusk; just at that hour when home looks most home-like, before the lamps are brought in, when fitful gleams from the fire light up the old familiar room in which you are sitting, and the faces of your dear ones; when you seem to belong less to the hard practical world of everyday life, and more to the world of shadows and of dreams.

There was some kissing and much handshaking when they came in, bringing Margaret Davenant, who had gone to the station to meet them. Charlotte was kissed, first by Hugh and then by Trix. She accepted the kisses of both on her little, cold, hard, smiling face, but to neither of them did she give one in return.

"Welcome home!" exclaimed Mrs. Sutton, between laughing and crying.

"Welcome home!" echoed Charlotte, but the words fell lifeless from her lips. At the touch of her hand, Trix shuddered involuntarily; it felt like the hand of a corpse. Still with the same hard fixed smile on her face, Charlotte fell back from the merry talking group into a quiet corner, waiting patiently for the summons to dinner, which was not long in coming.

"I am glad to see you looking so well and happy, Charlotte," said Hugh, during the progress of the meal.

"Yes, I am very well, and very happy," answered smiling Charlotte. "Great Heavens! what blind idiots men are!" she muttered under her breath.

"Yes, the country air has freshened her up a bit," said Mrs. Sutton, seizing on the topic. "Charlotte was brought up in a farmhouse, and hasn't been used to be moped up in a couple of rooms; and you'll go into a consumption, just mark my words! if your cousin Hugh doesn't turn you out to grass a bit oftener."

As soon as dinner was over, Hugh, with an apology, went to look up the friendly brother-practitioner, who had attended to his patients while he was away. Now that he was back home, he was all anxiety to get into harness again. Margaret did not stay long, and as soon

as she was gone, Mrs. Sutton took poor weary Trix into custody, and insisted upon showing her through every room in the house, Charlotte's little domain excepted; pointing out the different alterations and improvements that had been made in honour of her accession to power; favouring her, meanwhile, with a peripatetic lecture on domestic economy, and the virtues of early rising. "You may depend on one thing, my dear," she wound up by saying, "that if you come down late yourself of a morning, the waste and extravagance of your servants will cost your husband many a hard-earned pound a year. And always be punctual with your husband's meals, if you want to keep him good-tempered; for the best of men are like lions and tigers in this respect, that they are apt to show their claws, and even to snarl and bite, when they are hungry, especially if kept waiting beyond their proper time."

"Charlotte, my child, you are not wanted here," murmured the blind girl to herself, when left alone in the drawing-room. "Indeed, you are not wanted anywhere that I know of. You are neither useful nor ornamental; you neither love nor are loved; not a soul in the world would shed a tear if you were struck dead this minute. The sooner you become food for the worms, the better for yourself and everybody."

She rose from her seat with a sigh, and folded up her crochet-work, and went demurely upstairs towards her own rooms. As she was crossing the first landing, she heard Trix's merry laugh from some neighbouring room to which Mrs. Sutton was introducing her. Charlotte paused for a moment as the sound struck her ear.

"How I hate people who laugh in that brainless way!" she exclaimed. Then she went on her way, muttering: "A doll—a mere painted doll," and shut herself up in her own rooms for the night.

"They have made quite a gaoler of me, Charlotte, dear," said Trix, jingling her bunch of keys as she dawdled over a late breakfast next morning. "But I am afraid that not Mrs. Sutton herself can ever make a tolerable housewife of me; whatever small abilities I possess certainly do not lie in that direction. I would much rather practise on the piano this morning, or dip into the last new novel, than I would go into the kitchen and look after my servants, or write up the entries in my housekeeping book."

"Everything seems strange to you at present," said Charlotte; "but by-and-by all these matters will come quite naturally, and long before you reach Mrs. Sutton's age you will be competent to undergo a strict examination in the art and mystery of domestic management, and to graduate with honours."

Trix shrugged her shoulders incredulously, and went on with her breakfast. Presently up came the cook, anxious to know what she should order for dinner. Trix laughed outright.

"Help me out of the difficulty, Charlotte," she pleaded. "I have never had to order my own dinner, much less that of other

people; and I know no more than a Hottentot what instructions to give."

"Clear soup, boiled turbot, and a roast leg of mutton," said Charlotte promptly; "and see that your potatoes are not quite so watery as they have been for the last two days."

Trix listened in silent admiration.

"Suppose we put these bothering keys away for one day, and have a little music," she said insinuatingly to Charlotte, when breakfast was really over. "I am dying to try the new Erard in the drawing-room, and I am sure that you and I can do some charming duets together.

"I scarcely ever play on the piano," said Charlotte coldly. "I do not care for it."

"For what, then, do you care?" said Trix, opening her eyes very wide indeed.

"The harp and the organ are the only instruments for which I have any particular liking."

"What could go more nicely together," said ready Trix, "than your harp and my piano?"

"I never play in public."

"In public! What does the child mean? I am not a noun of multitude!"

"I ought to have said that I never play except when I am quite alone."

Trix's cheek flushed a little.

"I had a pleasant fancy in my head," she said, "that you and I were to be like sisters to each other; but if I try to get a step nearer your heart, you retire into your shell in a moment, and I am left standing in the cold outside."

"I don't think I have a heart," answered Charlotte, with a shrill little laugh; "or, if I have one, it must be in a state of ossification. You know, I told you the first time we met, that you would never like me, and now you are beginning to find my words come true."

"But I will like you, and love you too, in spite of yourself," cried Trix the impulsive; and with that, she started up, and flung her arms round Charlotte's neck, and kissed her on both cheeks.

"Beware of the rouge," said Charlotte with a little grimace; and as soon as Trix's back was turned, she rubbed her cheek vigorously with her handkerchief, as if thereby to remove the stain of the kiss.

When Hugh came home that evening, Trix had had quite a string of comical little misadventures, with the narration of which she entertained him over dinner.

"You must not take too much notice of what Aunt Sutton says," remarked Hugh. "It may be a very good thing to look diligently after your servants, and to understand pickling and preserving; but some people make a mania of that sort of thing, and then it degenerates into a nuisance. I certainly don't intend my wife to sink into a mere domestic drudge, and I think my best plan will be

to find you a competent person as housekeeper, who will take all such petty cares off your shoulders, and leave you time to devote your mind to other things."

"Much obliged, sir, but you will do no such thing," said Trix, with a little curtsey. "You drudge out-of-doors among your patients; it is only just that I should drudge a little indoors. You have not married an idle, fine lady, let me tell you. I have begun my apprenticeship to-day, and I don't think Aunt Sutton will find me an inapt pupil. Would your lordship like a cutlet *à la Madame Trix* for supper?"

Mrs. Randolph was as good as her word. She bought Francatelli and Soyer, and studied them in secret; for Mrs. Sutton would have been highly offended had she known that Trix took lessons in such matters from any one but herself. She set up a housekeeping-book, which she was very careful not to blot; and began to be less afraid of her own servants.

"She fancies herself clever, and wants other people to think her so," sneered Charlotte to herself. "But if I had no more brains than she has, I would not be quite so flippant of manner, or so glib of tongue. Won't Cousin Hugh tire of her in half-a-dozen years, when her good looks begin to fade! I don't think he really cares for her, even now. She pleases his eye, and he fancies himself in love with her; and when you have said that you have said everything. If one were only acquainted with some of those interesting little secrets, a knowledge of which seems to have been so common among the witches of years gone by! How nice, for instance, it would be to know that when you had made a wax image of your enemy, and stuck it full of pins, and put it near enough the fire to melt a little, day by day for several weeks, that for every pin-point in it the person you hated would feel a prick of pain; and that, as it melted, little by little, before the fire, so would the person of whom it was the effigy fade imperceptibly into the grave! Or, if one only knew the proper herbs to gather, with spells and incantations, at the full of the moon, and compose therewith a draught which would wither the good looks of those who took it, and turn them into old people long before their time! But all that kind of useful knowledge seems to be lost in these degenerate days. From certain points of view it must have been by no means an unpleasant thing to be a witch. What could be nicer, in its way, than to be able to flit through the air on a broomstick?"

Outwardly Charlotte was all smiles and amiability. But hers was a hard sort of amiability, that invited no confidence—that repulsed it, rather—that took note of everything, and was outwardly pleased with everything, and was yet thoroughly hollow and artificial. Again, and yet again, Trix tried to win her confidence, to become her friend; but all to no purpose. Charlotte smiled in her face, but kept her at arm's length. More than ever now she kept to her own part of the house, into which she never invited Trix to enter; and in the imagination of

the latter, those mysterious shut-up rooms formed a *terra incognita*, which she often explored, either by force or stratagem, in her dreams. Many of Charlotte's evenings were spent with Mrs. Sutton, rather than pass them in the drawing-room with Hugh and Trix, at home. For Hugh would not allow her to pass her evenings moping, as he called it, in her own rooms; and though her cousin Hugh was lost to her for ever, there were not many things that she could refuse him even now. She could not, without intense pain, bear to be a witness—if one may call a person nearly blind a witness—of the felicities of the loving young couple. If Trix went to the piano, Hugh was sure to follow her, and to linger close beside her till she had done playing. Perhaps, if there was no company, he would kiss her when she had done, and the sound stabbed Charlotte like a knife.

Then, by the same rule, if Hugh read aloud to them, Trix was sure to creep softly to his side, and nestle there as by right. Sometimes, as they sat thus, Charlotte had a painful sense upon her that they were sitting with hand clasped in hand; but this was not always the case when she thought it was. Her heart grew in bitterness from day to day, like an unripe apple on which no sunshine had ever fallen. It was not to be wondered at that she courted the solitude of her own rooms more and more, or that she preferred the company of Mrs. Sutton to that of Hugh and his wife, who—so she fancied—notwithstanding their extreme kindness to her, looked upon her as little better than an intruder.

Then, again, the new mistress of the house was gradually forming a pleasant circle of acquaintances, and set aside at least one evening in each week for the reception of company; on which occasions Charlotte was always invisible, nor could all Hugh's efforts persuade her to come downstairs at such times. She would sit in the dark in her own rooms, with open doors, listening to the music and the singing, and the sound of happy voices below stairs. The cloud that brooded over her life seemed to grow denser and heavier at such times, and to bruise her soul more pitilessly with its dull leaden weight—to bruise it, but not to break it. One great fact remained to her—one that was enough to keep her from becoming absolutely forlorn—her sight was slowly but surely coming back to her. One great thought remained to her, burning ever before her like a flame, which she tended and fanned with careful lips, so that it should not die out—the thought of the great revenge which she meant some day to have on the white-faced witch who called Hugh Randolph husband.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A LITTLE CLOUD.

For the first three months of her married life Trix was very happy. She thought on her wedding-day that she loved her husband very dearly,

but she found her affection for him growing broader and deeper as time went on, running through her life like a clear, full-flowing river through sweet meadows, making all things more beautiful by its presence. Between herself and Hugh there was a certain similarity of disposition. The nature of both was healthful and buoyant; they had both the same clear, objective way of looking at life and its duties; and they had both learned the art of yielding in little things, so essential to the concord of married life.

Yes, for a time Trix was very happy, and that, too, despite the dim shadow that began to dog her footsteps by day and night, at first almost unknown to herself, but soon with her full cognisance, although she would not for some time acknowledge its presence, but tried all she could to escape from it. That shadow was caused by the presence of Charlotte Herne under the same roof as herself.

Not till Charlotte had repulsed all Trix's efforts to win her way into her affections. Not till Trix had fought against her own instincts in the matter till it was useless to fight any longer. Not till she had discovered from chance remarks let drop by Charlotte herself, and from her own personal observation, how sly and cruel the blind girl was in many ways. Not till all these things had fermented for some weeks in Trix's brain, did a dim consciousness come to her that instead of a kinswoman and a friend, she had in Charlotte a secret enemy who would omit no possible occasion of working her harm. "But what harm can she do me?" Trix would sometimes ask herself. "None whatever, so long as Hugh and I continue to love each other."

If only Charlotte would take up her abode elsewhere! was a thought that was often in Trix's mind. But Charlotte showed not the slightest inclination for doing anything of the kind, and not for worlds would Trix have hinted at such a thing to her husband. For Hugh, with that inherent blindness so common among men when women are in question, saw and heard nothing but the smiles and pleasant tones and the outward seeming of affection, which both the women put on like a mask when he was by, and knew nothing of that condition of armed neutrality in which they habitually moved when out of his presence.

"You and Charley seem to get on together tolerably well," he would sometimes say to his wife. "She is a strange, shy creature, and very fastidious in her likings, but with time and tact you will easily win your way to her heart." To all which Trix would answer never a word.

But this state of things did not come about in a week or a fortnight, it was the result of time; and not till Trix had shed many secret tears did she build into her life the bitter fact that in Charlotte Herne she had an enemy whom not all her efforts could ever convert into a friend. This was the solitary speck upon her happiness; a very tiny cloud, all but invisible at first, but destined to grow and extend from

day to day, till in its blackness and storm both love and life itself seemed in danger of utter shipwreck.

One winter morning, when Dr. Randolph had been about three months married, the postman brought him half-a-dozen letters which, according to custom, he proceeded to open and read over breakfast. Five out of the six letters were read aloud by Hugh, and annotated verbally as he went on, for the benefit of his wife; but the sixth letter was read in silence, and then in silence put away. He then went on with his breakfast in a very absent-minded sort of way, and did not linger when the meal was over, as he customarily did, for a little nonsensical talk with Trix, but at once went off to his surgery, and there shut himself in. It was the first time Hugh had kept anything from his wife, and Trix felt as if her heart were beating in tears when he left the room without a word.

A little later on Charlotte came down, having breakfasted in her own rooms, and Trix went about her household avocations. Trix was away about half an hour, and was going back to the breakfast-room, when, just as she reached the end of the staircase, she heard her husband and Charlotte talking together in the hall below. Hugh was drawing on his gloves preparatory to going out, and Charlotte was standing with the handle of the breakfast-room door in her hand. A few words spoken by her husband arrested Trix's footsteps just at the turn of the stairs. What she heard him say was this:

"I have said nothing to Beatrice about the letter, neither do I wish her to know anything of the affair. Do you understand?"

"I understand," answered Charlotte. "You will answer the letter, of course?"

"Yes, I shall answer the letter. I hope to have further and still better tidings in a few days."

"If all turns out as you expect, you will go and see her?" said Charlotte interrogatively.

"It may be so; I don't know," answered Hugh. "To have found her again is something. Let us hope that the rest will follow in Heaven's good time."

Then Hugh went out. As soon as he had shut the front door behind him, Charlotte gave utterance to one of her little cold-blooded laughs, and clapped her hands with impish glee. "The spell works,—works,—works!" she said. And then Trix heard the door shut as Charlotte went back into the room.

Trix crept away to her chamber, as one utterly stunned. Hugh had a secret that was to be kept from her, his wife,—a secret that was shared by Charlotte Herne,—a secret that referred to some unknown woman! It was almost too preposterous for belief. She felt as if an invisible wall had sprung up, as by the touch of an enchanter's wand, between herself and her husband; and it seemed to her that, however simple and innocent this affair might prove to be, her husband could never be quite the same to her that he had

hitherto been. That fine and delicate bond of union which can exist between man and wife only where the most perfect confidence reigns between the two, in which the mind of each is as a mirror in which the other may see his or her own image reflected, which any attempt at disguise or mystery flaws irremediably, had been broken by Hugh's own act, and just then the prospect seemed faint indeed that it would ever be made whole again.

All that day Trix kept out of Charlotte's way, which was not a difficult thing to do, for the blind girl spent two-thirds of her time in her own room, and was well pleased to be left completely to her own devices during the short time she was downstairs. Later in the day she went to drink tea at Mrs. Sutton's, so that Trix and Hugh dined alone. But the evening passed as usual, and Hugh uttered no word respecting the matter that lay nearest her heart. Poor Trix lay awake half the night communing miserably with herself, her soul tormented by grievous doubts and misgivings.

A fortnight came and went, and Trix neither saw nor heard anything further that seemed to have the remotest bearing on the incident of the letter. In her heart, the wound still rankled, but she covered it up so carefully that both Hugh and Charlotte were entirely without suspicion. Trix always took care now to be near Hugh when he opened his letters, and at the end of two weeks her patience was rewarded. A certain morning brought a second letter which, after glancing at the superscription, Hugh put carefully away into his pocket, without reading it or saying a word. All the remaining letters were opened and read aloud. Charlotte was breakfasting with husband and wife that morning, and Trix was curious as to whether Hugh would take Charlotte into his confidence with regard to this second letter, as he had done with the first. Charlotte, being blind, was of course unaware that any letter had been put away by Hugh, and the first intimation of such a thing must necessarily come from him.

When breakfast was over, Hugh, according to custom, went away to his surgery. The morning was clear and frosty; and shortly afterwards Charlotte put on her hat and went for a walk into the garden. Trix ascended to an upper room, the window of which commanded a view of every walk and alley in the little wilderness at the back of the house. There she awaited the course of events. She had not long to wait. Hugh had learned somehow that Charlotte was in the garden, and presently he issued from the house by a side-door, and went in search of her. Trix, from her eyrie, saw them come together in the evergreen walk. Hugh put Charlotte's hand within his arm, and they paced slowly backwards and forwards for a full half hour, apparently very much in earnest; and Hugh referred more than once to a letter which he took out of his pocket, "the very letter that came this morning," said watchful Trix to herself.

By-and-by, the interview came to an end. Hugh went about his

avocations for the day, Charlotte went back indoors, and Trix's watch was over.

Dr. Randolph and his wife were invited to a party that evening at one of the most fashionable houses in Helsingham. Some women, under the circumstances, would have declined going, would have upbraided their husbands, and have gone off into a fit of hysterics. Trix did nothing of the kind. She had never looked more lovely than she did that evening; had never seemed to enjoy herself more thoroughly; had never been more affectionate towards her husband. Her acting in the charades was something quite beyond the ordinary run of amateur young ladies.

"Merely wants toning down the least bit in the world to make it fit for any Metropolitan stage," whispered some one in Hugh's ear, not knowing that it was Hugh's wife of whom he was speaking. "Just the sort of woman, by Jove!" went on the would-be critic—"just the sort of woman to make a fellow believe she was desperately in love with him, and keep him with his eyes bandaged while she was quietly playing some little game of her own. Eh, now, don't you agree with me?"

Dr. Randolph's only answer was an uncomfortable smile, after which he took the first opportunity of removing to another part of the room. Trix and he had a hearty laugh together, after they reached home, over the stranger's *mal à propos* remarks. "As if, dear, I could have any concealments from you—or you from me!" said Trix, looking up steadfastly in Hugh's face from the footstool at his feet, with eyes in which there was a world of reproachful meaning, only stupid Hugh had not skill enough to read them. "So absurd, is it not?"

And Hugh, seeing only the smile that wreathed his wife's lips, answered, "Very absurd, indeed!" But, somehow, neither of them laughed again that night.

More dreary days, and more dreary nights came and went, and Trix still kept watch and ward unrestingly. Two or three times, going suddenly of set purpose into the room, she surprised her husband and Charlotte in earnest conversation, which ceased at once as she went in.

"You look like two conspirators," said Trix laughingly, on one of these occasions. "Well, I only hope that you are plotting something for my benefit. Say, a charming bagatelle for my birthday, which will soon be here. I shall look out."

The postman, one evening, left three letters at Dr. Randolph's. Trix herself took them out of the box in the hall and carried them into the drawing-room, there to await her husband's return. Two of them were evidently business letters or circulars (Hugh was a speculator in the stocks of sundry companies); but the third epistle, which bore the London postmark, was unmistakably addressed in a woman's hand. Trix looked at it curiously for a minute or two, and then

put it with the others. "The crisis cannot be far off now," she murmured to herself. "Yet he smiles in my face, and tells me he loves me, and wishes me to believe he has no secrets from me. Fool!"

"There are three letters for you by this evening's post," were Trix's first words when Hugh entered the drawing-room.

She was standing with her back towards him, warming herself at the fire, and after one glance at him as he came in, and a careless indication of the letters with her hand, she resumed her previous position, and kept on gazing into the glass over the chimney-piece, in which her husband's every movement was reflected.

Hugh took up the two business letters one after the other, opened them, read them, and then flung them carelessly aside. When he saw the address on the third letter, he started, and his eyes went up instinctively to the glass to see whether his wife was watching his movements by means of it. But Trix was apparently busy examining a tiny pimple on her chin, and not noticing anything that he was about. So Hugh's eyes fell back to the letter he was holding between his fingers; he tore the envelope half open; then a fresh thought seemed to strike him, and he thrust it hurriedly into his pocket unread.

"Merely business letters, I suppose?" said Trix with a little yawn, as she turned from the glass.

"Merely business letters," answered Hugh. "But all business may go beg to-night, for me. My soul cries aloud for music."

So Trix sat down to the piano, and Hugh stood beside her for a little while, and turned over the pages for her. But when Trix shut up the book, and began to play a selection of airs that she knew by heart, he left her and sat down in an easy-chair near the fire. Trix went on playing one piece after another without stopping, glancing over her shoulder occasionally, only to see that Hugh's attention was far away from her and the music—that he was brooding darkly over some hidden care.

"Where is Charlotte? Is she not coming down to breakfast?" asked Hugh next morning in an unmistakable tone of vexation.

"She has a bad headache, and prefers breakfasting in her own room," answered Trix, not without a spice of malice.

Hugh shrugged his shoulders, but said nothing, and the meal was gone through more silently than common.

"If he would only tell me!" mourned Trix to herself when Hugh had gone about his morning's business. "I could forgive him almost anything if he would only take me into his confidence. But he will not. There is something in his former life that he wishes to hide from me—something of which he is ashamed. And he thinks so poorly of my love that he will not tell me! If this goes on much longer, I shall *hate* him."

Going her rounds about two hours later, she went into the surgery to see that the fire had not been neglected. Her sharp eyes caught

sight of sundry minute scraps of paper which had been thrown inside the fender, aimed doubtless at the grate, but falling short of it, and still lying there unburnt. Trix looked closer. The scraps of paper had been written on, and the writing was that of a woman. When she had ascertained this, without pausing to consider further, she went down on her knees, and picked the fragments of paper to the last morsel carefully out of the ashes. Then she hurried to her own room and locked herself in, taking with her a small bottle of gum, a brush out of her paint-box, and a sheet of drawing-paper. The task she had set herself to do was, bit by bit, to pick out and shape into a coherent whole—or into something as closely approaching it as was possible under the circumstances—the numberless tiny scraps of paper which she had rescued from the fire. After three hours' close application, the result of her labours was a document bearing no unapt resemblance to a piece of mosaic work, of which the following is a copy. Where words, or parts of words, are missing, Trix had failed to find the scrap of paper that should have supplied the *hiatus*.

"My dear Hugh,—That I venture to ad . . . . you thus after all that has passed bet . . . . us, is a proof that your last letter has influenced me in the way that you, in your . . . . . , hoped it would do. I have decided to do that which you so strongly urge me to do. But I dare not go alone. You must accompany me. You must smooth the way for me. I leave you to arrange all details as to when and where I must meet you. It is a journey that I have longed to make, day and night, for years. Yet now that the time has nearly come, I dread it—oh, how I dread it! But to you I look for courage: to you I . . . . . happy in your love . . . . . marry . . old times that can never be forgotten . . . ."

The remaining fragments were missing. They had doubtless been burnt. But such as it was, Trix read the letter again and again till she knew its every word by heart. Then she put it carefully away in her own desk, and locked it up. By the time this was done, it was necessary to dress for dinner. Dr. Randolph had invited half-a-dozen friends for that evening. It was a quiet little affair without fuss or ceremony, and Trix had never shone to greater advantage than she did that evening in her *rôle* of hostess.

"She seems to have grown ten years older in manner during the last month," remarked Hugh Randolph to himself as his admiring eyes followed Trix about the rooms. "There has been a change—a something about her during the last few weeks that I can't make out. Everybody tells me what a lucky fellow I am to have secured such a wife, and I think everybody is quite right."

"Your good spirits were quite infectious to-night," said the doctor to his wife, when their guests were all gone, and while they were waiting for their bed candles. "We should have bored one another dreadfully, if we had not had you to keep us alive."

"My good spirits keep you alive!" said Trix, with a little shrug. "Why, I am the most melancholy woman in Helsingham!"

Whereupon, Hugh Randolph had a hearty laugh, and then went whistling upstairs to bed.

Two days passed, and, so far as Trix could make out, no further letters were received by Hugh from his female correspondent. Charlotte Herne and he had one or two secret conferences when Trix was supposed to be out of the way, but there was not one of them of which she was not cognizant. On the evening of the second day, Hugh said to his wife, "I am going to London to-morrow."

Trix's heart gave a great bound, and for a moment or two she could not speak. She stooped, and pretended to pick something off the floor. Then she said:

"To London! That will be charming,—especially if you should have the good sense to take your wife with you."

"In the present case, that, unfortunately, is impossible. My business is of such a nature that I cannot ask you to accompany me, greatly as I should like, under other circumstances, to have had you with me."

"A very pretty speech, but rather too ornate for my fancy. *Excusez-moi*, if I seem rude. Well, sir, if your business is of such a nature that a lady may not go with you, you must perforce go alone. At what hour does your lordship start?"

"I purpose going by the 2.40 P.M. train. But, Trix, dear, it is hardly like you to be put out by a little *désagrément* of this sort. I am called from home, and I must go. We doctors are the slaves of others."

"Do you think, Hugh, that you quite comprehend my feelings in this matter?" said Trix very gently. "This will be our first separation since our marriage. Is it not possible that I may feel your journey to London a little on that score, and without any reference to my own desire to go there?"

"I am a stupid fool, and deserve the reproof," said Hugh emphatically. "As you say, this will be our first parting, and I trust that it will be our last for a long, long time to come. You may be very sure of this, that I shall hasten back home as quickly as I can."

"Hypocrite!" muttered Trix, under her breath. "Oh, if I could but hate him!"

The 2.40 train next day carried Hugh Randolph London-wards. Another of its passengers was his wife, who, thickly veiled and plainly dressed, had followed him to the station, had taken a ticket unperceived by him, and was now seated in another carriage of the same train. She was fully bent on tracking out the dark secret, on which, as on a sunken rock whose dimensions the mariner cannot even guess at, the argosy of her wedded life seemed in danger of utter shipwreck.

(*To be continued.*)

THE WILD GILROYS.

By Rosa Mackenzie Kettle, Author of "The Last Mackenzie of Redcastle," "On Leithay's Banks," etc., etc.

I.

MY school-friend Elspeth, or, as we called her, Elsie Gilroy, came of a wild stock deep-rooted in the Perthshire Highlands. Though in past years our families had been intimately connected we had never met until we were numbered among the twelve girls educated by the Miss Lewins in Edinburgh.

It had been a sore trial to us both—one which drew us nearer together—to be sent from our country homes, and separated from our brothers. Had it been a boys' school, I think we could have borne it better; but a dozen girls—what could we have in common with each other?

We could both of us ride fearlessly across country, taking lightly any fence and dyke in our way, pull an oar, play cricket, or keep the score, hit a mark with arrow, pistol, or rifle; but of what use would these powers be in a town among young ladies?

Fortunately for us the Miss Lewins were not as anxious to make their pupils proficient in half-a-dozen showy accomplishments, as they were to fortify our minds and hearts for our life's work. It was the fashion of that day for ladies, not richly endowed, to take into their homes, and educate, a limited number of girls. These good sisters threw their whole hearts into the task. If we did not profit by their care as we ought to have done, it was not their fault, but ours. On the whole, I think we did them credit.

I remember well how grand the Highland pass looked on my first approach to my friend's house, where we were to spend Christmas together. Cataracts, arrested and turned to ice, glittered in the frosty sunshine; holly-berries gleamed redly in the crannies of the lofty rocky walls, against which clung the bare roots and stems of leafless trees; snow-capped mountains towered overhead.

There were no snow-ploughs in those days; but I think the storms were fiercer and the drifts deeper than now. We had time to study the prospect, for our carriage broke down, and we had to make our way as best we could on foot.

Fortunately we were not shod like the ladies of the town; but even our country training did not prevent our finding further progress, as Miss Lewin, in her pretty old-fashioned French, would have had us say, *un peu difficile.*

But we were not unaided; the defile resounded with glad shouts of

welcome. All the clan seemed on foot to welcome the Laird's daughter; and I, her chosen friend, was not neglected.

I have not forgotten—I never shall forget—the warm hand-clasp that closed upon my frozen fingers; the voice that whispered words of cheer; the glance from dark eyes, shaded by yet darker lashes, which met mine, and warmed the heart of the chilled, timid stranger, when she first entered that Highland glen.

It seemed no great distance, after all, to the Laird's mansion, which lay back among woods which extended to the foot of the snowy mountains. Our walk, in spite of difficulties, was a merry one.

"The wild Gilroys," with their dark, flashing eyes and passionate tempers, never frightened me. Perhaps the free out-of-door life I had led with my own brothers made me understand them better than I had at first appreciated my school companions. Oh! to be in the country—to see the grand hills and feel the crisp touch of those Highland breezes, without being told to lower my veil and take care of my complexion! It was life, it was joy to me—fuller life, deeper joy—and there was plenty of both in my friend's home.

Elsie was scarcely less of a companion to her bold brothers than I had been to mine. I was motherless; but there was a delicate matron in the eagle's nest, and she was the only girl. It had been thought right to send her away for a while, as the boys were a trifle rough, to where she would have other healthy girls to keep her company.

Now she had come home for a time to be the idol of her mother's heart, and her brothers' plaything. Mr. Gilroy said, as he gazed proudly at his recovered darling, that "there had been nae luck about the house while Elsie was awa'."

There was plenty of merriment now—in the evenings, dancing and singing, games of all sorts, forfeits rigorously exacted. By day we scoured the country on rough-coated ponies, which seemed to enjoy the swift pace as much as we did. It was a bright, brief holiday, very different from the quiet weeks in the Edinburgh square.

One night, when the wind howled dismally, and moaned among the ivy leaves encircling the old windows, Elsie and I were sitting in an unusually grave mood with her mother, who was not feeling well. Changes of weather always affected her, especially violent gales; I have seen her turn pale when the blasts shook the walls of the old house. As for me, I loved to hear the wind roar and sweep down the pass, where it often levelled some lordly pine; but we seemed safe within those strong walls, and youth is often selfish. It did not occur to me then, as it does now, bringing always her image before me, to murmur, as Lady Elspeth did—

> "Oh, hear us, when we pray to Thee
> For those in peril on the sea."

"Did you live on the coast?" I said eagerly. "I have never

seen the sea—the open sea, in a great storm. I am sure I should love it."

"Yes; and I have lived with men who went down to the deep and knew its fearful secrets; but they did not return to tell them," said the lady of the castle in a strange, hushed voice, only just audible as a wild gust dashed the boughs against the windows.

"My early home was on the storm-swept coast of Erin," she went on; "most of my own family were sailors, and I think I inherited from my mother a dread of the roaring wind at night. Oh, how I have seen her watch and heard her sigh when I sat beside her in the turret which overlooked the tempest-tossed ocean. My early married life too was saddened by a storm at sea. And now my own best and bravest—for I confess, though a mother should have no favourites, I love Hector best of all my boys—is bent on leaving me and going to make a fortune beyond the sea. When I hear the wind wailing next Christmas, I shall fancy that it is sounding his dirge."

"Nay, mother dear," said Elsie affectionately; "many go down to the deep and bring up its treasures. Why should Hector be cast away?"

"Because I love him too dearly," said her mother bitterly. "It is always the best beloved who are taken. Perhaps it is because it is wrong to cling as I do, even to one's own child; but he was my first-born. Dear as you all are, not one of you comes quite up to the young eaglet who gladdened my first years of marriage; and he has always been so bright, so brave, so bonnie. He is the heir; he ought to stay at home and help his father to manage the property. His parents are getting old, and need him. Why must he go and battle with the waves of this troublesome world, and cross the cruel sea?"

"Hector thinks it's right to push his fortunes on the other side of the globe," said Elsie, turning to me with a word of explanation. "My father is not rich, and there are so many of us. Our grandfather, General Gilroy, had lands in the far West to which we have a claim. My brother wishes to inquire into it."

"Surely that is right and sensible," I said. "Dear Lady Elspeth, we cannot chain the eaglets. They will, they must, take flight."

"Then let it be the younger birds," said Lady Elspeth sadly, but with a fleeting smile. "Hector is our mainstay. His father will miss him as much as I shall do. Oh! Kate, help us to keep him at home. Do not encourage this vain dream."

I felt myself colour guiltily, for I feared that a certain dawning fancy had fanned the flame, and I knew that I had not tried to extinguish it.

"Nay, if you cannot persuade him, what chance of success is there for me?" I said. "Besides, like Elsie, I think him right in his desire to prosecute this claim. Let us hope that he will come back in safety and victorious."

A wilder gust roared down the wide chimney, blowing the flames of the wood fire into the room.

"That is a bad omen," said the trembling lady. "On just such a night as this his uncle, after whom he is named, is said to have been lost at sea on his return home. Ever since then this roaring wind has been to me a foreboding of evil."

Lady Elspeth rose as she spoke, and bade me good-night. I thought she was disappointed by my not promising to help her, but she kissed me very tenderly. Elsie went with her mother, and I, too, retired, but not to rest. For the first, but not the last time in my life, the wind and beating rain kept me awake.

II.

In the morning every trace of disturbance had vanished. The sky was blue, the earth was green, and all my good resolutions of the night before seemed to have been blown away like the snow from the trees in the Pass. In the Highlands there is seldom a dismal thaw.

In my girlish heart, without the equally slow dull process of forgetfulness, my fears were laid, I was standing by the waterfall at the head of the glen, with Hector Gilroy.

He had convinced me that his prospects on the other side of the Atlantic were as fair as the promise of this winter morning; not, as his mother thought, fleeting as the hoar frost, which so often heralds rain.

With improved means he would return, and, after settling his father's affairs, make me his bride, and bring me to the Castle; where, he said, and I believed him, I should be welcomed by all.

I told him of his mother's forebodings—of the visions she had seen of his uncle, another Hector Gilroy, drowned, as she believed, at sea, one, dearly loved as himself, of whose fate no certain news had ever been received by those who watched and waited long, at last hopelessly—but he laughed at all my warnings.

Hand in hand we tracked to its source the stream that made its wild leap through a chasm in the rock. Far up among the hills it bubbled up among moss and peat and dead leaves. We did not imitate those lovers who wandered by the brook, clasping hands across it, till it widened into a river which separated them and was finally merged in the sea.

Close together, side by side, we wandered on, with the meandering stream, narrowing as it wound through the dark heath; laying our plans for the future confidently. The mighty ocean might indeed soon flow between, but it should not long divide us.

"Give me one of your bonnie curls, Kate, and you shall have a dark lock of my shaggy mane," he said, laughing, as we broke a coin and divided it for constancy. And so we parted—troth plighted.

I ought to have advised him to consult his kind good parents and

my own father. I might have confided in my faithful friend, his sister, but I did neither. He said that it would be selfish to add to their burdens until his fortunes were assured, that he was certain to come back safe and rich enough to claim me. Though he was one of the wild Gilroys, I trusted him entirely.

I did not waste my time in vain regrets. Life was just opening before me, with love in prospect, and I resolved to make the best of it; I took back to school with me a girl's energy and readiness to learn, and a woman's perseverance. The good sisters were delighted with me, and asked whether I had been studying with any one during the holidays. I did not think it necessary to enlighten them!

From time to time letters came to my school friend, whom I now regarded as a sister. Hector lost no opportunity of writing when his ship touched at any port or met a homeward-bound vessel. He did not write to me; I had strictly charged him not to do so, as I would not enter into a clandestine correspondence, and he respected my decision.

Lady Elspeth's letters, which came frequently, always saddened her daughter, and I shared in her anxiety about her mother's declining health, and many domestic troubles. The wild young Gilroys were always in some desperate scrape—all excepting Hector, she said mournfully—and he, the bravest and only steady one, was to be the scape-goat, and bear his brothers' sins into the wilderness.

I did not accompany Elsie to her Highland home when the school broke up at Midsummer. My father and my own brothers wanted me, and I confess that I was unwilling to re-enter the Pass, without those soft words of welcome which had cheered me in the snow.

Besides this reluctance, I knew that few guests were invited now to the Highland Castle. The slackening of its wonted hospitality was attributed to the state of its mistress's health; but had there not been other reasons Lady Elspeth would not, in her unselfishness, have put this one forward. Fragile as she looked, Hector's mother was one of those who, when they have buckled it on, never willingly lay aside their harness till the battle of life is ended.

The wonder was how my own people had got on so long without me at our Castle Rackrent of a home. The feminine head of our establishment, Aunt Monica, was not in the least like the grand saint-like mother of the sinning Saint. Not one of our boys had been convinced by her of, or had turned from, the error of his ways. Though we all loved her dearly, not one of us ever thought of minding her.

Aunt Monica was said in her youth to have had a disappointment. This I remember hearing before I attached much meaning to the words; but they were so often repeated that, at last, I attached to them a sad significance.

It must, I thought, in my arrogant youth, all have happened long ago; but our gentle aunt still carried the memory of that early sorrow about with her, and we all respected it.

My father never suffered her to be slighted or thwarted. "Poor thing, she had had enough mortification to bear," he would say, under his breath. The numerous family connections who visited us, always treated her with great consideration, saying to each other, "How well she stands it," and we, careless enough about most things, imitated our elders, and regarded our gentle aunt's mysterious grief as a sacred thing not to be forgotten or spoken of lightly.

Soon after my return home, there was a great gathering at our house. My eldest brother, Walter, came of age, and all the tenants and many friends came to the festival.

I remember especially an old couple, for whom a carriage was sent to the far end of the Strath, as they sat looking on at the dancing, which was carried on with great spirit in the large hall, saying to me when my father took me up to introduce me :

"Eh, Laird, yon's a bonnie lassie, but naething now comes up to what Miss Monica was before her trouble." So it seemed that they too knew about her disappointment and felt for her.

She was very fair to look upon still, even now, and glided among our guests with a grace which I with my school-girl awkwardness was not likely to surpass. Aunt Monica had a royal memory and always said the right thing to everybody. If there was any creature that day who felt himself or herself neglected, it was not her fault.

As if by magic she found out wherever there was any sore feeling or misapprehension, and would set matters straight in a moment. But it was all in the spirit of love and gentleness. If ever there was a being who seemed intended to win love in return for her utter unselfishness, it was my father's still beautiful sister, and yet she had loved in vain. That man must have been as hard as St. Kevin !

In one of the intervals between the dances, I sat down near the old couple, whose home was under the shadow of the blue hills which closed in the upper end of the Strath.

I had seen my aunt talking to them, and I longed for the first time to penetrate into her hidden trouble.

"You remember Miss Stuart when she was quite young?" I said, interrogatively.

"Ay, and very bonnie—not unlike yourself," said the old man, kindly. "She's bonnie now, but it's after a different fashion. Just like our loch when twilight comes o'er it after a bright summer day—the soft grey after the sunlight's faded awa'."

He sighed. His wife said, somewhat sharply—

"Ye should na liken the young leddie to one that's so sairly faded. Such a blight, let us trust, will never fall on her."

"What was it?" I could not help exclaiming. "You all seem to know about it, but I have never heard the truth, and I am not too old to love a story."

"There's not much of a tale to tell," said the old man ; "but it was a life-long sorrow. She just loved one of those wild Gilroys

from the mountains, and he sailed away and left her. Mortal ears have heard nought of him since."

"And she all busket in her wedding-gown," exclaimed his wife, angrily, "waiting for her bridegroom at the altar! I don't know what ye mean by no tidings—there was talk enough about him in the Strath, and in his ain country-side! We saw her with our own eyes, which were young then. Like a blushing rose she looked, with her sweet red lips trembling. She's never got the colour back since they lifted her from the tiled floor where she had fallen—as white as any lily, and with the stem broken. There's a little stoop in her gait, and she does na carry her head sae proud like. 'Twas a cruel thing to have to tell her that her bridegroom was na to be found in hall or chamber, and it just struck her down to the earth."

"Ay, ay, 'twas a cruel shame," said the farmer from the hills, his eyes sparkling indignantly. "I was near enough to hear the Laird whisper that she had best come home; and to see him sign to the minister that there would be no wedding that day. And so her life's happiness ended. It all came of her fancying a wild Gilroy!"

"You have fairly frightened the dear lassie, John," said his wife, reproachfully. "She's lost her fine colour like her poor auntie."

"Never fear, Minnie, it's coming back again," said her husband. "Our bonnie young leddie will have a better and truer man for her master, who will not leave her on her bridal morn, like that feckless gallant, Hector Gilroy!"

III.

I DID not leave my Edinburgh home—for it had become a second home to me—when my education was nominally finished; nor was I the first of the Miss Lewins' pupils who had voluntarily remained with them in order to profit by the advantages afforded to girls who wished to improve themselves by a longer residence in our beautiful capital.

There were changes in my father's house, and, though they were for the better in most respects, I no longer felt myself necessary to its inmates. The Laird had married again—a lady of suitable age and disposition, who made him and my brothers happy, and was beloved by them in return.

My engagement to Hector Gilroy was no longer a secret. He had more than justified mine and his sister's expectations, and success had crowned his efforts. The claim he had gone out to establish had been granted. He had redeemed the inheritance for his father, and got the estate into working order. The old Highland castle had been brightened and beautified, and Lady Elspeth had recovered health and spirits when I spent a second Christmas there, warmly welcomed and acknowledged as a daughter.

Hector had been aided in his difficult task by one of the wealthiest and most influential men in the colony, who happened to be a native of Perthshire. Mr. Gillespie boasted of being a self-made man. Now an opulent merchant, he had begun life, he always said proudly, as a boy among the Perthshire hills, watching sheep browsing on the summer pasture grounds, snaring birds—up to every kind of mischief. After all, however, he had proved himself a canny Scot.

He had offered the young Highlander a place in his office, and very soon taken him into partnership. In fact, he had been like a father to him, and had lately announced his intention of making over the acting part of the business to Hector altogether, and returning to spend his hardly-earned, well-deserved fortune in his native country.

I do not think that I should ever have made up my mind to take the step proposed to me by my lover—that I should cross the sea to marry him—if this kind friend had not written and seconded it. He was tired of work, he said, and longed to come home ; but he could not leave Hector alone in a strange land. He must see him settled first, with a gude wife to keep him company.

I showed the letter to Aunt Monica, who was spending a little time with me in Edinburgh, and we consulted about it together. It might be a long time before Hector could come and fetch me. We should be keeping this good man waiting, who was yearning for rest. I had no ties now to keep me in Scotland.

"Would it help you, dearie, if I were to go across the water with you?" said my aunt, while a soft, rosy bloom stole over her fair face, as if she was shocked at her own boldness. "There's not a thing to keep me at home now, any more than yourself."

I thanked her with my whole heart. Her unselfish offer lifted a great weight off my mind. No opposition was made, and at the most favourable season we left friends and country, and went forth into the wide world together.

Our voyage was prosperous and eventless. Hector met us at the port to which we were bound—a great, beautiful city, where his partner's business premises were situated. We found rooms prepared for us in Mr. Gillespie's mansion, but he himself was absent at his country house, which he was refurnishing for the bride and bridegroom's occupation.

He had promised Hector that he would return in time to be present at our marriage, which was to be very quietly celebrated. Afterwards, most probably, he should take his departure for Scotland.

That week, while we rested, was to me a very happy one. I delighted in the new scenes around me, and in the presence of my lover, as well as in looking forward to a happy future. The only drawback to my otherwise perfect enjoyment, was that I fancied Aunt Monica was sad and restless. She seemed terribly nervous, and started at every unaccustomed sound.

"Are you afraid that we shall not be kind to you, Aunt Monica?"

I said, tenderly, on the day before the wedding. "Only think how precious you will be to us both after all you have done to help me. I never could have undertaken the voyage alone."

"I am afraid it was very foolish of me to come so far away from home and our own people," she said, tremulously. "I am sadly too old. I do not always remember how long it is since I was a girl. When you are safe in your husband's keeping, I had better, perhaps, go back to Scotland."

"Oh no, you must not leave me," I exclaimed; "I hope you are not thinking of asking Mr. Gillespie to escort you?" I said hurriedly, for it occurred to me that my aunt had asked several questions about his plan of returning in the next homeward-bound steamer.

Aunt Monica gave a little shriek of offended maidenly modesty.

"Certainly not, my dear! Mr. Gillespie would not care to be bothered with the charge of an elderly lady like me. Never mind my nonsense. I suppose the travelling has upset me; and no wonder when I never went farther from home than Edinburgh before in all my life. The whirl of the machinery is in my ears day and night."

Aunt Monica was quite her own sweet self when she came to my bedside the next day; and when she helped me to put on my bridal attire, I thought she looked very bonnie in her pearl-grey silk with old lace cuffs, and the ruff standing up close to her white throat, with lappets of the same falling over her light brown hair, which was still without one thread of silver.

"And how do ye like him, dearie?" she said softly. "He should be kind and friendly, if he's a Perthshire body." Aunt Monica sighed as if she was thinking of home as she arranged the folds of my veil.

"Oh yes, he made me feel as if I were back in the dear old country," I said. "He's just one of our own folk. There's an echo of the accent of the hills lingering on his tongue, and a bright dark flash in his eyes that I never saw in any glance but Hector's. He's a Gilroy himself, one of the clan—that accounts for it, though it's a far away kinship. Gillespie is a name he took up when he first came out to the Colony. Why, Auntie, how your hand is shaking. I do hope you are not going to be ill again on my wedding-day!"

"No, dearie, I'll not fail ye—not if I can help it," she said affectionately, rousing herself with an effort. In a few minutes we were ready. The carriage was waiting. We went downstairs together.

I scarcely noticed what followed. I cannot remember anything more, distinctly. I seemed to be in a kind of dream. When I came to myself I was standing at the altar, my hand in Hector's. Suddenly I heard a deep sigh, and lifting my eyes I saw Mr. Gillespie leave his place and cross over to the opposite side hurriedly. There was, however, no interruption; the ceremony proceeded and was completed. When we moved away I noticed that Aunt Monica was leaning on Mr. Gillespie's arm, looking very pale, and trembling excessively—much more overcome than I was.

The clergyman gave her a glass of water after we had retreated into the vestry, and, after the signatures were affixed to the registry, our small party went back to our temporary home.

As we stood together looking from the large window of the saloon upon the gay crowds in the grand square of that beautiful colonial city, our host said :

"The time has come for me to speak plainly. Monica, you have guessed my secret. I thought you would, though others might be blind. I am the lost one, found again—your uncle—Hector Gilroy."

He did not look at us, though the words were addressed to his nephew, but at his forsaken bride ; then he added in a lower tone, full of feeling, "Monica, can you ever forgive me ?"

She did not answer him in words, but silently placed her hand in his. He clasped it fervently, and went on speaking :

"No one knew my embarrassments—I was deep in debt—in danger of arrest—half mad. Like a coward, I fled, leaving the woman I loved, unworthy, as I felt, of her affection, never meaning her to see or hear of me again. When I came to my senses I shrank from the farther crime which I had contemplated, but I had not the courage to confess my faults. Better to seem dead and to be forgotten. I thought that all had forgotten me until this morning ; but as I stood, an hour ago, before the altar, near her whom I had left to stand there in her forlorn girlhood alone, I heard a sigh—I caught a glance——Monica, tell me that they were for me—tell me that *you* had not forgotten me !"

"No, Hector, I never forgot you," she answered firmly. "I guessed your secret before I left England ; I recognised your hand-writing, though it was cleverly disguised, when Kate showed me your kind letter, and I wanted to assure you of my forgiveness before you returned to Scotland. Believe me it is thorough and hearty."

"Then let us redeem the past," said Mr. Gilroy, still holding her hand tightly. "My errand in Perthshire was to repair all wrongs, and then to seek you out, and win you, though late in the day, to share my fortune. Shall it be so, even now, and here, my dear one ?"

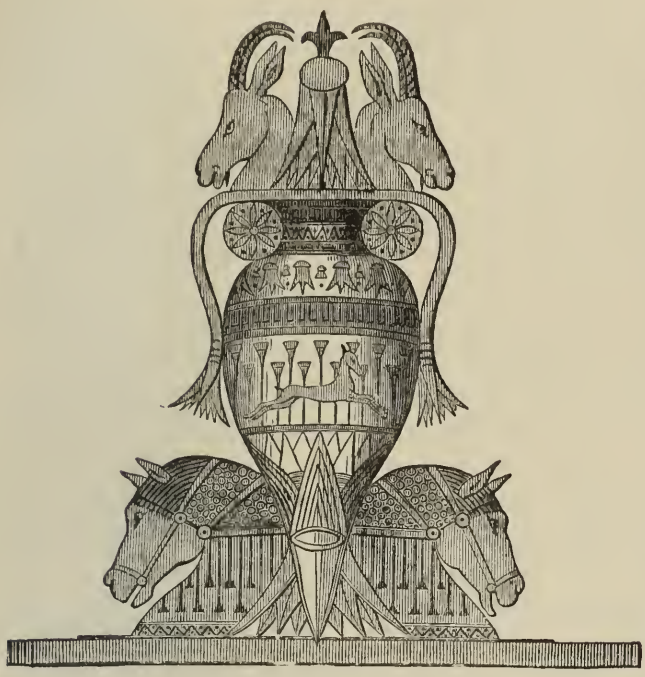
He stooped down and kissed her, and she did not shrink from his embrace.

Need I say that Uncle Hector did not secure his passage in the homeward-bound ship ?

He and Aunt Monica were married before we left the colonial city, and went to our country home, where after a while they followed us. When we were all quite accustomed to this new life, and all business matters arranged so that Hector could take his uncle's place, Mr. Gilroy and his wife left us, and went to gladden their own people in the Strath and at the old Castle in the Highland Pass, returning from time to time to visit us in our Transatlantic Paradise.

IN THE LOTUS-LAND.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Letters from Majorca," "The Bretons at Home," etc., etc.



Ancient Egyptian Vase.

WE have seen the amazing difference existing between the Alexandria of the Ptolemies and the Alexandria of to-day; a difference wider even than the great gulf of time separating the ancient from the modern city.

At the end of the last century the decay of Alexandria was complete and deplorable. Ruin and misery met the traveller on every side—the few who then visited its shores: for it is only in comparatively recent years that Egypt has become popular both with antiquarians and tourists. Luxuries, the very barest comforts had disappeared, had even ceased to be desired—for human nature soon gives up wishing for the impossible. Miserable tenements now occupied the site of former palaces and temples; the howl of the jackal made night hideous. The streets by day were a scene of refuse and rubbish. It seemed impossible that Alexandria could ever recover herself. But it is the impossible, as well as the unexpected, which so often happens.

We have seen how in the first centuries of this dispensation Christianity had spread over Alexandria and the Valley of the Nile. It has been well said that Christianity was born in Palestine, but was strengthened and established in Alexandria. The Egyptians were essentially a serious and religious people: and they at once saw and embraced the divine beauty of the new Revelation.

There was also much in it to remind them of their own mythological creed, which had also been not without its beauty and fundamental truths.

Under the old religion there were cells in the Serapeum at Alexandria where people might withdraw from the world and live a life of absolute solitude and seclusion. Again, penance was inflicted by the priests for small sins—which seems to argue that confession existed—and much of all this we see reproduced in the Roman Catholic creed.

It must also be remembered that, for Alexandria to embrace Christianity as thoroughly and completely as she did, was the greatest possible testimony to its truth and reality, the most complete earthly triumph the religion of Christ had yet accomplished.

For Alexandria was at that time the most learned city of the world, and her men were the rulers of thought, the greatest of philosophers, with intellects penetrating and far-reaching; the very first to discover flaws in a new doctrine, the very last to embrace error. She had numberless heathen philosophers; and she had boasted of such men as Clemens, Origen, and Athanasius, who had fought valiantly for the truth. Had Alexandria retained her great men, the doctrines of Mohammed would never have gained its hold upon the country. But the glory of Alexandria had departed; her learned men were silent in the tomb; the doors of her great academies were closed; thought and culture had already flown westward. Byzantium was waxing great.

That Alexandria fell away from her allegiance was no doubt partly due to the struggles which Christianity had to encounter against heathendom.

We can also see how such a doctrine as that of Christianity, with all its power and all its beauty, so essentially a doctrine of peace, love, and self-denial, would have a very hard fight with the fierce and fiery Eastern races; and that the people—in contradistinction to the learned and refined few—would be very slowly affected and influenced by a religion that must change their very nature if conscientiously followed. Yet in the fourth century all Egypt was Christian. Julian the Apostate had risen and fallen after vainly endeavouring to restore the worship of the false gods. Christian churches were built; there were many patriarchs in the land. But dissensions immediately arose. The harmony that ought to have existed was destroyed by quarrels about forms and ceremonies and points of doctrine. Christ Himself had said: "I have come, not to send peace but a sword upon the earth"; and from that day to this His words have been fulfilled.

Yet in those days there were the "few righteous men in Zoar"; the few who were the salt of the earth, obeying the Christian religion to the letter.

No country in the fourth century possessed so many monastic institutions as Egypt, and it was the handful of faithful men who greatly helped to support them. Schism and persecution had both paved the way for Mohammed, when in the year 20 of the Hegira, the city fell into the hands of the false prophet and his followers. The Jews had all taken flight to the number of 70,000; but half a million of inhabitants remained to offer their allegiance to the

conqueror, and an amazing amount of wealth. The Christian churches disappeared and mosques arose in their stead. A few Copts only remained true to their belief.

The new people brought fresh energy into the country, and once more everything flourished. Ostensibly this change for the better was attributed to the new religion of Islam; in reality it was due to the new life, perseverance and determination which the Arabs brought with them, and which replaced the indolence and expiring energies of the people they conquered. It was then that Cairo sprang into existence and gradually extinguished Alexandria.

Its present existence is another tribute to the wise judgment of Alexander the Great, who, three hundred years before the Christian era, foresaw all the possibilities of its situation. Like the Egyptian Phœnix, Alexandria has indeed risen from her ashes, not after a lapse of five hundred years, but after more than thrice that period of time.

And this is owing to its situation and to nothing else. Egypt herself has contributed little or nothing to the present prosperity of the town. It is a commercial prosperity alone, and it is due to the wealth and traffic of all nations flowing into her ports. As in the days gone by, so now, the ensigns of all countries may be seen flying in her harbours; and energy and life distinguish her quays. Her merchants bear with them that well-to-do air which always accompanies success; they envy no man, and would change places with none.

It is always so in the early days of prosperity, the youth of a city or a nation or an individual: and Modern Alexandria is still in the early days of her youth. She will rise to greater heights than her present success. Her people have not yet grown accustomed to the new order of things. As wealth to the *nouveau riche*, so their prosperity is magnified and exalted by its freshness. This will give them strength and impulse for greater efforts in the future.

Once more Alexandria may say of herself, as might have been said of her in days of old: Nothing succeeds like success. The glory of Ancient Alexandria has departed, and with it all her romance, all her beauty; everything that appealed to the imagination and the senses. There is no longer a *Bruchium*; the Royal Road has departed; her palaces and temples are no more; her festival days are things of the past; the lavishness of a Cleopatra, the voluptuous idleness of an Antony, all, all is over. A new order of things, and a more wholesome, and probably a more lasting, has arisen.

Yet to the imagination, one's sense of the romantic, the contrast is painful. Everything about Alexandria of to-day is so terribly modern, so very ugly; huge blocks of buildings that remind one of the Paris of Hausmann more than anything else; everywhere the European element predominates; only sundry names, and some of the people you meet, and the language you hear spoken—only these elements remind you that the Mediterranean flows between you and Europe, and that you are verily and indeed in the Lotus-Land.

We stayed in Alexandria the night, compelled to do so for want of room in Cairo, though we should probably have done so in any case. We did our best to get up a classic feeling in patrolling the streets. Here once stood the Bruchium; there was the Cæsareum; now we halted upon the outlines of the once Royal Road; here Antony and Cleopatra had passed many and many a time to their barge, in all the pomp of a royal progress, in days when pomp and wealth and progress knew no bounds, and appetite was insatiable. We went out at night and gazed upon the outlines of Pompey's Pillar, standing out clear and dark, silent and solitary, against the starlit sky; we gazed upon the Arab cemetery at our feet, desolate and abandoned, looking more like an antique ruin, where the "devastating dust" of the ages slept in peace and neglect, than anything else we had seen; we strolled to the ruined forts and looked out upon the wide, dark waste of waters, the beautiful waters of the blue Mediterranean.

But it was all of little use. We could not transport ourselves into the past. Everything was too new, too modern, too realistic. Only when we closed our eyes to present scenes, did those wonderful visions of the days that had been, take firm hold of our imagination. Then and then only were we once more in the past. Then and then only were we assisting at a royal progress; watching the ancient games, gazing upon the dazzling palaces, inhaling the scent-laden air of the wonderful gardens. With closed eyes we saw the marvellous beauty of Cleopatra, and pitied Antony as well as blamed, for it must have been hard indeed to resist such charms; we heard her silvery tones rising and falling in the rhythmic measures of the poets of the time; we did homage to all her surpassing grace: and we said, Could this woman really have been dead to all the virtues—for is it not hard to associate anything but beauty of spirit with gracefulness of form?

But the indelible record remains; we cannot blind ourselves to the truth; we may not put sweet for bitter and bitter for sweet.

And so at the end of the last century it seemed as if nothing could raise Alexandria from her state of ruin and depression; her misery and poverty, her wretched huts, her despairing and desponding population.

And yet within the last forty years—even within the last twenty-five—she has risen—to quote the ubiquitous Phœnix once more—like that wonderful bird, from her ashes, and in the most rapid and marvellous manner has again become crowded with life and energy and wealth. All the sounds and tokens of prosperity abound; and as far as human eye can see, this prosperity need never again forsake her.

Never again need her streets become mere receptacles for her ashes, or the melancholy howl of the jackal disturb the solemn repose of her nights. New harbours have been constructed; every modern appliance and improvement has been given to the town; aqueducts bring pure water within the reach of all; trees line her thoroughfares; health has

Widow mourning in Arabian Cemetery

become a first consideration. Egypt is growing rich; may she not once more become great?

But the consequence of all this is that Alexandria is not Egypt, and the Oriental influence is conspicuously absent from this new and great commercial city.

So perhaps for some things it may be as well that not even a trace, not even the atmosphere of Ancient Alexandria is to be found in the Alexandria of to-day. Certainly it caused us, the morning after our arrival, to leave it without regret, by the early train for Cairo.

The railway station was a scene of confusion. Porters and dragomans were tearing about as if they had suddenly gone insane. The impulsiveness of the French and Italians is as nothing compared with that of this people. Though we were tolerably early, almost every seat in the train appeared taken. The passengers seemed of all nations; but the amiable trio we had met at breakfast the previous morning were not of the number. They had "done" Egypt and the Nile, and were now proceeding to Europe to "do" Italy. We saw them no more until that memorable day—of which we have given the record—when we were making our way from Naples to Rome.

The compartment we entered was almost full; the occupants were all Egyptian, or appeared so. Of the five persons, four seemed to pay especial deference to the fifth. At that moment the station-master came up, and with every mark of profound respect received some peremptory order from the fifth traveller. An animated conversation was going on between the occupants of which we understood not a word. A few moments before the train started they all rose, and four of them after ceremonious leave-takings, left the carriage. We were alone with the fifth. The door was closed by the guard and locked.

As soon as the train was off, the fifth and remaining Alexandrian put on a red fez, opened his bag, and brought out papers in all languages, some of which he politely offered us, and proceeded to make himself comfortable in his corner. He had dark, penetrating eyes and a clear olive complexion. His features were good, and he was decidedly handsome. "I am not an Alexandrian," he confided to us, after we had entered into conversation—he spoke excellent English—"but a Turk. I have just arrived from Constantinople, and carry important diplomatic despatches to the Khedive. Those gentlemen who were with me when you entered are Alexandrian friends. I usually have a reserved carriage, but the train is much crowded, and I was glad to make an exception in your favour," he added politely, with a very winning smile. "To tell the truth, unless absorbed in work, I would rather travel in the society of one or two whom I like, than travel alone. But, as a rule, in these days of 'personally conducted tours' you run too great a risk."

"It was very good of you to take compassion upon us," we said, "and makes all the difference to the comfort and pleasure of our journey."

"I should not have admitted every one," he laughed; "but our diplomatic profession teaches us to read people at a glance. We never make mistakes. I fear I am growing too personal," he went on, still laughing, "but, I hope, not rude and uncomplimentary. I knew also, that elsewhere you would be very uncomfortable. The officials here will not put on enough carriages; they crowd people to suffocation; and Egypt was never so full of travellers."

"So much so, that we were told scarcely an hotel in Cairo has a vacant room," we returned.

"That will not affect me," said our fellow-traveller, whom for convenience' sake we will call Osman, "for I have the honour of staying with the Khedive."

We were passing over the first railway ever constructed in the East. Stephenson was the engineer, and it was finished in the year 1855: one of the quickest and cheapest lines ever built, in consequence of the extreme flatness of the soil. It seemed singularly out of place here, for no sooner were we out of Alexandria than we began to feel the true Oriental influence about us.

Before the construction of the railroad, the highway to Cairo was by the Mahmoudeeyah Canal: a longer but more picturesque route, which few now think of attempting. It lay on our left as we passed out of the station, and the barges with their sails set, going up and down, looked wonderfully picturesque against the clear Eastern sky.

For some distance, the gardens and habitations of the wealthy merchants of Alexandria enlivened the banks: and here, in the afternoon, is the fashionable promenade of Alexandria—its Hyde Park and Rotten Row.

To our right stretched the waters of Lake Mareotis, a lake which has played so great a part in the history and prosperity of the Lotus-Land. Time was when its waters were crowded with shipping, and on its banks bale after bale of the spices of Arabia sent forth their rich perfume; whilst the surrounding plain charmed the eye with its luscious vineyards, and no feast was considered perfect, ungraced by their famous wine. Strabo sings the praises of the lake, and Horace, Virgil and Athenæus all mention the overflowing of the Nile, by which the vineyards became so luxuriant, the wine so famous. These were not the days of total abstinence, and probably the sparkling cup appealed to those great minds as much as to their less gifted brethren: though being great minds, they would no doubt be moderate also. For them the midnight orgy and the draught too deep would carry no temptation. This did not prevent them from singing the praises of the vintage.

It has departed with those classic days. Egypt no longer yields wine, excepting in small quantities. The little it does give is good, or we thought it so. There are some ancient ruins near Lake Mareotis, which are called *Kurum* by the Arabs, the word meaning

"vineyards;" and the wine presses used by the ancient Egyptians, hewn out of the rock, may still be seen.

The waters of the Lake had been gradually subsiding in the reign of the Arabs; but in 1801, during the siege of Alexandria, the English cut through the neck of land lying between the lake and the sea, and the whole of that fertile region was laid under water, whilst one hundred and fifty villages were destroyed.

All this we soon passed, and for water we had only the flowing Nile itself. It was picturesque with the barges that were going up and down the stream, whilst every now and then long strings of camels heavily laden gave the banks a distinctly Eastern aspect curiously interesting to the unaccustomed eye. They walked in defile one behind another with slow and measured step, as if to them also life was very much of a burden. Seeing them thus, it was difficult to imagine that they could rouse themselves to extraordinary energy and fly faster than the wind over the boundless tracks of the desert.

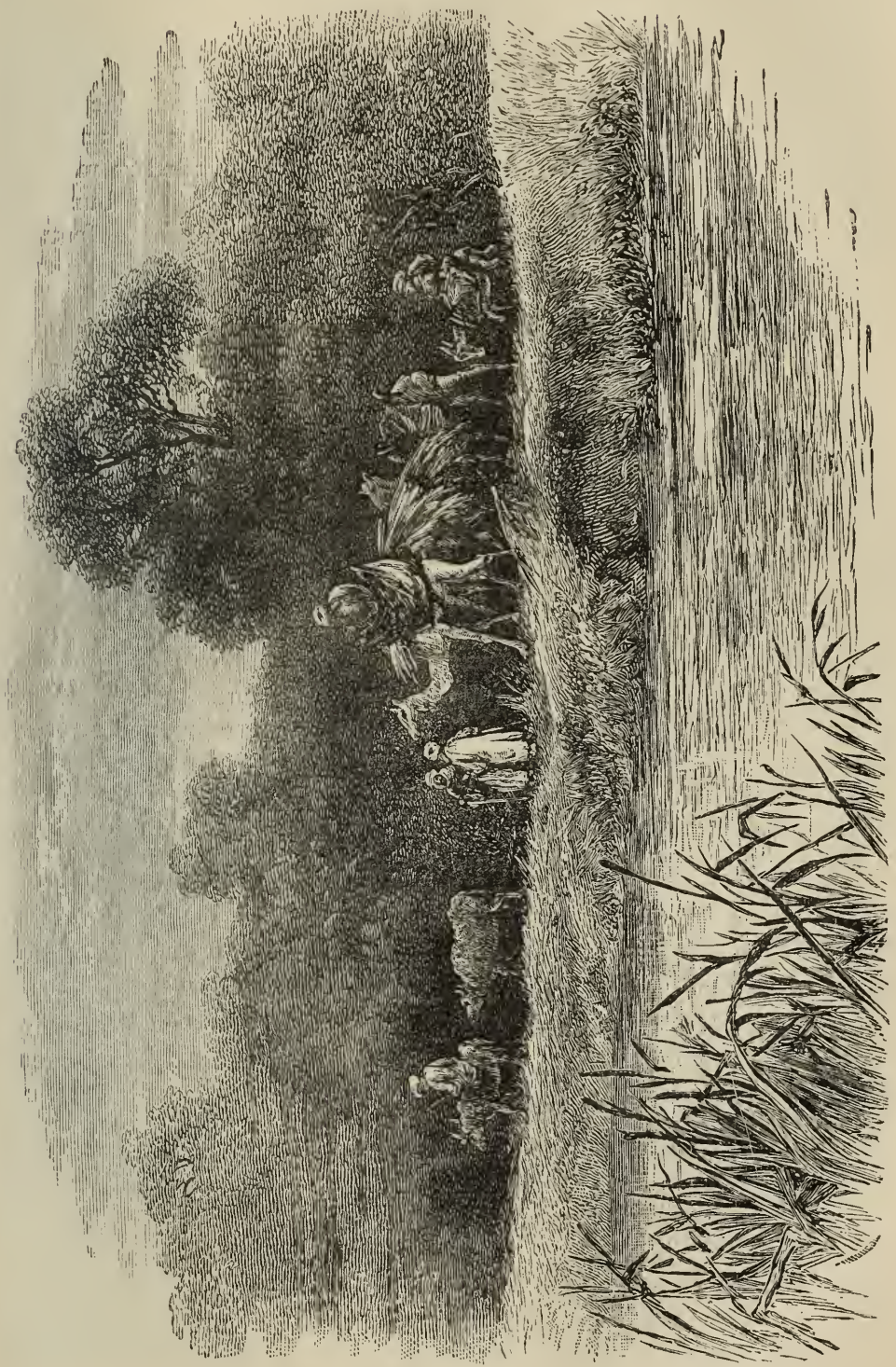
In passing through the Delta, the scenery is not very varied. Flat, wide plains for the most part meet the eye, through which the Nile takes its winding course. But these plains are fertile and yield abundant harvests of grain and fruit and flowers, thanks to the overflowing of the river. Groups of fruit-laden palms rear their heads against the background of the clear sky, and the tamarisk and sycamore are seen in great beauty. In spite of an absence of startling features, one felt distinctly in the East: and if at any moment there was any danger of forgetting it, a string of patient, plodding, heavily-laden camels wending their weary way along the banks of the river would soon appear and bring back the wandering mind. Their awkward, undulating motions look anything but agreeable, but from a distance their quaint, unfamiliar outlines make them very picturesque.

Occasionally also, stalking upon the banks of the river, or gazing upon its reflection in a stagnant pool of the plain, we caught sight of that singular bird, the Ibis. With its long legs, its curved bill, its grave air of listening to sounds inaudible to mortal ears, no wonder that it was considered sacred by the ancients, and carefully guarded from all harm.

Besides the river, the Delta is intersected by many canals, for purposes both of irrigation and navigation. These remind one somewhat of the Dykes of Holland, though they are on a much larger and more important scale: for the Dutch dykes fulfil only the one object. Here the cotton plant grows in abundance, and is one of the chief articles of industry and commerce. It fills up the landscape and adds to its beauty. Its blossoms are of different colours, red, white and yellow, and in the distance look very much like endless plantations of the wild rose.

One of the quaintest objects meeting the eye as the train passes

onwards is the waterwheel. These wheels flourish in great numbers and in all parts. They are turned by buffaloes and donkeys; for



On the Banks of the Nile.

the donkeys in the East only yield in usefulness to the camel. The camel also takes his turn at the wheel, but his soft eye seems to pro-

test against being put to such base uses. These waterwheels with the fellaheen and the young boys hovering about, scantily clad in white garments, form very distinct pictures, and redeem the landscape from a good deal that is monotonous.

Vineyards are not often seen, but where they exist they remind one of the vineyards of Italy, for they are trained on very much the same principle. The leaves spread themselves over trellis work, and for long distances you have a brilliant green carpet suspended in mid-air apparently by magic, whilst the fruit falls below in luscious bunches of purple and green. But these vineyards are no longer a feature of the Delta, and the wine-presses for the most part have rest from their ancient labour.

We passed many villages along the line, as our express train rushed onwards, and we thought nothing more curious. Most of them were distinguished by a dull grey tone, which stood out in strange contrast with the surrounding country; strange and sad, yet not inharmonious.

It was difficult to imagine that they were human habitations. Grey mounds, for the most part, with nothing but an opening to admit people and daylight; huts made of Nile mud; overshadowed here and there by the everlasting palm, the only visible object of grace and beauty. The dovecots were occasionally in evidence, and the pillar on which the master of the house takes his frequent standing as lord of everything within the mud enclosures. These huts, the system of life of the poor fellaheen, have been described elsewhere. In their earliest years, when the energy of youth gilds the world, and makes even hard work a luxury, they are happy and contented; but for them the grasshopper becomes a burden long before its time, and the evil days come far too soon.

There are not many stations of importance lying between Alexandria and Cairo. Of these Damanhoor is one of the first.

It is a large town, in the very centre of the most fertile part of the Delta, given up to cotton manufactories and agricultural interests. Damanhoor looks for the most part like a large village, with its grey mounds and shapeless mud huts, only varied by the small minarets and cupolas of a Mussulman cemetery, looking quaint, picturesque and Eastern. It was near here that Napoleon almost fell into the hands of the Mamelukes in 1798, through imprudently venturing within their boundaries. "I tell you it is not written above that I am to fall into the hands of the Mamelukes," he exclaimed to one of his generals: "into the hands of the English—*à la bonne heure.*" Was the prophecy spoken in a spirit of bravado; or was there within him some unconscious foreshadowing of the time to come? The day dawned, at any rate, when he remembered the words with an anguish that proved his deathblow.

It was market day at Damanhoor—their small market: the larger one is on Sundays—and the station was thronged with a motley

THE IBIS.

crowd. Sellers of oranges were crying their goods with their peculiar Eastern intonation, and water-carriers were going about with their goat-skins, whilst others were offering something stronger than water for sale, and found ready customers. It was a singular scene. Men strong and swarthy were hustling each other in their loose white abbas, whilst above their dark faces and flashing eyes the turban stood in strong contrast with the brown animated countenances. The day was brilliant, intensely hot, and their various fruits and sparkling water looked refreshing and were in constant request as long as the train halted. For ourselves it was impossible to attempt to touch anything that had come into close contact with these natives.

"And one never grows used to it," said Osman. "Though I have lived so much amongst them, I can touch nothing that I have seen them handle. If I passed through my own kitchens when dinner was in preparation, I should fast that day. My early life was spent in a Paris embassy and I cannot forget the white faces and fair hands of my father's cooks. They spoilt me for this Oriental life; not only in that but in other ways also. Is it not a motley group!" he cried, looking out upon the restless crowd. "What rasping voices; what flashing eyes! Yet how different from the crowd of a Paris or London platform! How much more interesting, how full of life and colouring is this scene, compared with anything you would find in London. This would drive some artists wild with delight, whilst the English counterpart, with its riot and vulgarity, could raise no other emotion than pain and horror. In themselves, too, these Orientals have the advantage. Their lives are more simple, less stained by sin. They have a deep consciousness of religion, and few amongst them but are exact in their devotions. That alone is a great gain. Where would you find it in London? How often do the lower orders enter a church, or give a passing thought to the account we must all face at the last day?"

"There is probably only too much truth in your remarks," we returned. "Yet where our people do rise they rise to a height of which these Egyptians have never dreamed. Christianity is as much above all other religions as——"

We hesitated, feeling that every man's creed, like his prejudices, should be respected; this was treading on delicate ground.

"I know what you would say," returned Osman; "and you are right. I am myself a Christian at heart, and recognize all the sublime beauty and perfection of the creed. I often think of that verse in the Bible and apply it to myself—where Naaman feels that he has a difficult, and apparently insincere, part to play. 'When I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.' He did not ask with Pilate 'What is Truth?' for he felt it; but prejudice and worldly interest compelled him, against his conscience, to keep to his old form of worship.—We are moving on at last."

The crowd slightly made way for the train; a few passengers scrambled hastily into their places; we steamed away. Damanhoor, rising upon its eminence, receded, soon leaving nothing visible but its small minarets and cupolas standing in clear outline against the bright Eastern sky.

The next station—at which we did not stop—was Teh el-Baroot, near to which is the site of the Greek city Naucratis, founded 700 years B.C., a city mentioned by Herodotus and Ptolemy. It was once famous and flourishing, and had nearly 1000 years of prosperous existence before it fell into ruin and decay. Alexandria had then arisen, and everything gradually gave way to the city founded by the great Macedonian. In those days all things paled before it and fell into insignificance.

Soon after this we reached the Rosetta branch of the Nile, a wide, magnificent arm of the river, crossed by a splendid bridge spanned by twelve arches, and resting upon immense hollow pillars of cast iron: a gigantic work which cost nearly half a million of money. Until it was made, trains were ferried over, but the system was dangerous. Here in 1856 Achmet Pasha, the heir to the Viceroyalty, was drowned. The ferry-boat was out of its place, and the driver, not perceiving this in the darkness, ran the train into the river.

"It was a terrible catastrophe," said Osman. "One of those incidents in which you Christians would see the hand of Providence, we the finger of a malignant Fate. At any rate, it is one of those events which change the destiny of a country. Egypt has done so well under the present Khedive, that one wonders whether he was not always predestined to the position."

The train stopped on the other side the bridge at Kafr es-Zyat, and here one enters into the true Delta, that portion of it lying between the two great branches of the Nile. Nothing is more imposing than this endless plain, with its rich and abundant fertility. The industry of the Fellahs is beyond praise. Idleness is unknown. Every man has a task to fulfil, and does it to the best of his power. Here, indeed, he "goes forth to his work until the evening," and then has well earned his rest. Villages of mud huts, small towns built of more enduring stone, are scattered about, but so rarely that the immense plain resembles a vast, unbroken, cultivated field. And perhaps many of the villages would escape observation if it were not for the groups of palm-trees which almost invariably overshadow them, and relieve the landscape from its endless monotony. It is impossible not to recur over and over again to these palm-trees, and thus bring before the reader's mental vision the dominating, almost the only feature of prominence in so many of these stretches of Eastern landscape.

Not far from Kafr es-Zyat are the ruins of ancient Saïs: consisting to-day of fragments of houses, broken monoliths, blocks of stone, and the remains of a gigantic town wall; yet once so flourishing and

famous. It was the capital of the Saïte and other dynasties, and was in its glory about 700 years before the Christian era. The goddess of the town was Neith, the Minerva of the Greeks, whom the Egyptians represented sometimes with a shuttle on her head, sometimes with the crown of Lower Egypt, holding the sceptre in her left hand, and in her right hand the symbol which some consider to be a Cross, others the Key of the Gates of Life. Athens itself is supposed to have been founded by a colony of Saïtes, who introduced into Greece the worship of Minerva.

The Temple of Neith, an immense and magnificent building, was the burial-place of the Saïte kings, and Herodotus makes special mention of the tombs of Apries and Amasis. The temple was of almost unparalleled splendour, with magnificent avenues guarded by colossal sphinxes with human heads. These were sculptured from blocks of granite brought from the quarries of Assouân, distant a forty days' journey from Saïs. Nothing seemed too gigantic in the way of labour and enterprise for this wonderful people. The most remarkable monument was an enormous monolith brought from the Island of Elephantine, in the Upper Nile; the transport occupying three thousand men three years. The mind shrinks from comparing the giants of those early days with the highest modern achievements. We stand amazed even before the French cathedrals of the middle and earlier ages; but what are even these monuments, matchless and beautiful as they are, compared with the labours of the Egyptians? Yet even those days were not free from error and accident. At the moment that the monolith was being raised into the interior of the temple, it fell and crushed beneath it all the workmen engaged in the task. Amasis looked upon this accident as an evil omen, and the monument was finally erected outside the temple.

Behind the Temple, according to Herodotus, was the tomb of Osiris.

"We are here on classic ground," said Osman. "For ages this part of the Delta has been the most fertile portion of Egypt, contributing largely to her wealth, industry, and comfort; it is crowded with historical interest; whilst in its neighbourhood are many of the most famous of the Egyptian ruins. The whole country is a study and an experience from the hour you land in Alexandria to the moment when, standing upon the Rock of Abooseer, you look down upon the long stretch of falls and rapids forming the Second Cataract, and admire the wide-spreading waters of the Nile. If this is your first visit to Egypt, I envy you your pleasures and delights."

"Unfortunately, our time is limited," we replied. "We shall see neither the First nor the Second Cataract."

"That is a pity," returned Osman. "Yet it is a little late to do the Nile. And it is most unpleasantly crowded. These crowds take the charm and romance out of everything."

"You have done it all," we said, more in the light of a remark than a question.

"Years and years ago," he replied smiling; "and more than once. I have been four times up the Nile to the Second Cataract, and I could go four times more. There is no voyage so interesting, so full of charm and repose, and therefore so health-restoring. Whilst Europe is shivering in the rude embrace of east winds and ice-bound waters, you are breathing the softiest, balmiest, most life-giving airs.

Lotus Flower with its Fruit.

Of course the voyage was made in our own dahabeeyah. Those were the days for travelling. We never encountered, never dreamed of the possibility of such crowds as now drive one frantic, and almost compel one to remain at home. And for this your great organizers of tours are chiefly responsible. They may have conferred a benefit upon the many, but have ruined travelling for the few."

"And this year, unfortunately, the crowd seems worse than ever," we said.

"Much worse," returned Osman. "It is more than a nuisance—it is a plague. Amongst ourselves we call it a modern Plague of Egypt. The winters in Europe are becoming so insupportable that everyone is flocking to Cairo and the Nile. So you are on the whole to be congratulated on not being able to do the Nile this year. But you will return; and if you take the first of the season instead of the last, you will do well."

The train was making way through the fertile Delta. Our fellow traveller, who seemed acquainted with every inch of the ground, pointed out villages and knew them all by name, indicated roads that led to far-off famous ruins, and had an adventure or an anecdote to fit in with every fresh curve or winding of the Nile.

Presently we reached Tanta, the most important town in the Delta. Above and beyond the station rose the octagonal minaret and graceful dome of the Mosque of Sayyed el-Bedawee. The town possesses its long streets of bazaars, a palace of the Khedive, and every modern improvement. The station, like that of Damanhoor, was crowded with a restless throng, some of them selling fruit and water, but the greater number standing in apparent idleness and curiosity. Nevertheless it was an animated and interesting scene.

"But this is nothing," remarked Osman. "The time to visit Tanta is in April, at the greatest of its three fairs. You will then see a strange sight: the gathering together of specimens of all the tribes of Egypt, who meet to do honour to El-Bedawee, the most popular of all the Mussulman saints."

"We never heard of him," we said, frankly confessing our ignorance.

"Probably not," laughed Osman; "he does not appear on the Christian Calendar. All the same, I believe he was a good man. What he did I can hardly tell you. He was born about the year 1200—596 of the Hegira—at Fez in Morocco, but in his early days was wild and unsettled. Then, as is sometimes the case, a sudden change came over him; he abandoned his wild life, and grew full of the fire of devotion. He fell into swoons and ecstasies, saw visions, and for hours would remain wrapped in a religious contemplation from which nothing could rouse him. He is said to have performed miracles, but these may have been merely the faith-healing evidences of which we hear something in these days; or it may be that Providence even at that age occasionally permitted a manifestation of this divine power through man: the latter receiving to some extent those gifts which the Saviour of the world said went out 'through prayer and fasting.' For in thinking over these matters, as I do, it sometimes appears to me that man has gradually withdrawn from God, not God from man; and that to a chosen few the close relationship of those early days is still permitted."

"It may be so," we replied. "There is a good deal to uphold your view, and nothing to prove to the contrary. And so Ahmed el-Bedawee became a saint, and then the people venerated him, and now they worship at his tomb?"

"Yes. His influence over others was unbounded. In person he was tall and powerful and extremely handsome; but from fasting he became almost cadaverous, and very little of his face was visible excepting two black piercing eyes. The Bedaween still wear these face cloths. His life was one of stern self-denial. He went about not seeking his own glorification, but endeavouring to do good to his

A Seller of Date-Bread.

fellow mortals. Honour was thrust upon him; he did not seek it. He died full of age and honour. Such is the tradition handed down of the life of this man; and it seems to me that no Christian could desire a better record, whilst very few, excepting the Apostles, have attained to as much. The people now pray to him, and perhaps he himself, from the light of the other world, would be the first to reprove them. At the call to prayer proclaimed by the Muezzin before daybreak from the lofty minaret, he is invoked as Supreme Sheykh of the Arabs. In any great calamity—storms, inundations, riots, and so forth, his aid is again invoked. Ya Sayyed, Ya Beda-

wee! you may hear repeated a thousand times; for like the heathen of old praying to Baal, they think they will be heard for their much speaking."

"You seem to have studied the Bible, although you are not a Christian," we observed.

He smiled somewhat sadly.

"In outward profession I am not," he replied, "but at heart I believe that I am a Christian if I am anything. I was born Mohammedan, but can any one of sense and learning compare the two creeds for a moment? Are you not convinced that the one is of divine origin and revelation, whilst the other is full of earthly flaws. What human intellect could have conceived the doctrine of Christianity?"

"But if you believe this, how can you remain Mohammedan?" we asked; for there was something about our fellow traveller that invited confidence and permitted a certain familiar questioning.

"How could Naaman remain outwardly a heathen, or Agrippa resist Paul's pleading?" returned Osman. "Why will a man put off making his will until he is on his deathbed and his powers are failing? In my case there is the strong bond of habit to be finally broken and thrown aside; the traditions of childhood and youth. If I publicly renounced Mohammedanism and embraced Christianity I should have to give up all diplomatic work. It would make no difference to my mere worldly condition: I live in a palace now, I should live in a palace then: I am not influenced by such vulgar considerations as these; but Othello's occupation would be gone, and my heart is very much in my work."

"Yet life is fleeting, and you would more than gain by the exchange."

"I feel it and know it," he returned; "and one day I shall have the courage of my convictions. Perhaps at your next visit to Cairo I shall be able to accompany you to your church as one of yourselves. I go even now sometimes, but I feel outside the pale. Yet who would not go to hear the quiet, convincing preaching of the Dean, so full of charm and beauty?"

Once more the train moved on. The crowd suddenly hushed its noisy chatter. The idle ones turned to dispose of themselves and their elegant leisure elsewhere; perhaps to wait until another train brought them a fresh source of excitement. The dark flashing eyes and open mouths of the fruit and water sellers, so animated a moment ago, sank back into listless apathy and repose. There was no intermediate stage; the change was not gradual but sudden. The dome and minaret of the mosque of Bedawee were beautiful and graceful objects, outlined against the clear Eastern sky.

"Not far from the mosque is the market," said Osman, "and like all the principal markets in Egypt, it is a curious and lively scene. Every tribe is represented. Men and women in the scantiest and coolest apparel are plying their trades. Here you will see one with a

pitcher gracefully poised upon her head, its dark red or clay colour contrasting with the black head and eyes and glistening teeth beneath. Sugar-cane sellers squat upon the ground, and snake-charmers are doing their best to extract money from the strangers who may be present. The whole scene is a medley of dilapidated stalls and camels; a restless noisy crowd, all trying to outsell each other; but all for the most part friendly and good-tempered."

"But is it possible that these fiery-looking Arabs never fight and quarrel?" asked H.

"Frays and fightings do happen amongst these hot-blooded people, and at one time they threatened to become so serious as to put an end to the pilgrimage," returned Osman; "but in this respect they have improved, and such passionate rows and disputings as one constantly sees in Tangiers, for instance, and other parts of Morocco, I have seldom witnessed in Egypt. The people have a good deal of consideration for each other, the strong for the weak, the young for the old."

"Have you been here at their great festivals?" said H.

"You allude to the fairs: but their greatest festival is the birthday of the Saint. I was once present at it, and I hope never to be present again. The tomb of el-Bedawee is close to the mosque—a very ugly mosque, by the way; not half as good and interesting as the more ancient schools belonging to it—and to this tomb thousands of people make a pilgrimage. At times as many as half a million, it is said, visit the town. Imagine what that means to a place possessing about 60,000 inhabitants on ordinary occasions! I almost died of suffocation. Yet the whole thing is so interesting from a picturesque point of view that every one should see it once."

"Do they perform their pilgrimages in the same spirit as the Roman Catholics?" we asked.

"Not altogether," replied Osman. "The Roman Catholic pilgrimages are purely devotional; here the pilgrims combine business with religion. Their creed permits them to turn to worldly matters when their visit to the shrine is over. The Roman Catholic pilgrimage is chiefly propitiatory, the Mohammedan is often nothing but an act of homage. You will not find cripples here hobbling up on their crutches, and expecting to return without them."

"Yet they must expect to get something out of their pilgrimage?" said H. "And do they not believe in miracles at all?"

"Two questions at once," laughed Osman. "I will reply to the first. In visiting the shrine of the Saint, they certainly expect a good deal. They think he has great influence upon their lives and can give or withhold prosperity. This he bestows chiefly on those who visit his tomb. Ah, you see how different is your creed, where the sun shines on the evil and on the good, and the rain falls on the just and on the unjust."

"True; but we believe that good will be rewarded and sin

punished. In fact, do we not see every day that 'the way of transgressors is hard?'"

"Of course; but what I wish to emphasise is that the Protestant creed is essentially one of long-suffering and loving-kindness, whilst all other creeds depend chiefly upon good works. As to miracles, the Mohammedans believe in them to a certain extent, but they do not believe that a pilgrimage would restore a withered limb or heal a mortal disease. The priesthood have not a very superstitious hold upon the people, who are treated as beings possessing a little judgment and common sense. I fear it is often very little indeed," he laughed.

"But they evidently have both faith and fervour."

"Very much so," returned Osman. "And even the fanaticism of the past ages has not died out. I have watched them worshipping at the shrine of Ahmed el-Bedawee and many of their faces have worn a look of complete ecstasy; not the mad delirium of the howling Dervishes which is an effect purely physical, but the expression of a soul wrapped in the highest religious devotion."

"In speaking you seem to place yourself outside all this," we said. "The very turn of your phrases proves that you are no Mohammedan at heart."

"I have already said so," replied Osman, rather sadly. "And if we continue our religious discussion you will rouse my conscience, and I shall not be able to put off my conversion to a more convenient season!"

"Could anything better happen to you?"

He shook his head.

"Have patience," he replied. "I believe I shall be permitted to live until the day when I can outwardly declare my conversion. I am half way on my road. Already I am not like Naaman; I no longer 'bow down in the house of Rimmon;' I have ceased all religious forms and observances as far as Mohammed is concerned. So far I am not insincere. See, we are getting over the ground."

We had been rushing through the plains of the Delta, which seldom varied in their fertility. Crossing a wide bridge, over the second arm of the Nile, the train immediately stopped at Benha el-Assal, one of the chief stations on the line.

"'The town of honey,'" said Osman. "Honey is the great commerce of this place. It sends it all over the world; and its oranges and mandarins are some of the best in Egypt. Not far from here are the ruins of Athribis, one of the great towns of the Delta in the fourth century."

"Are they worth visiting?" asked H.

"Scarcely," replied Osman, "in comparison with all the ruins one finds higher up the Nile, though the original town seems to have existed in the days of the Pharaohs. The ruins are nothing more than heaps of rubbish, in which one can just distinguish some of the

An Inundation in the Delta.

ancient outlines. Greek and Roman remains have been found here, amongst them a bust of red porphyry of a Roman emperor and a stone with a Greek inscription, now in the Boulak Museum. You will find that Museum intensely interesting; it is full of treasures of the past; and if you care for antiquarian studies and collections, you might spend weeks lost in a dream of the days gone by. The building itself is magnificent, and everything in it is splendidly arranged and classified."

We were now not very far from Cairo, and soon the distant outlines of the Pyramids would be visible. A certain excitement took possession of us as we felt we were about to behold for the first time these most ancient monuments of the world; should gaze upon the domes and minarets of the city whose foundations were laid by Cambyses.

"I can well enter into your emotions," said Osman. "Young as I was when I first visited Cairo—I had not quite reached the age of nineteen—I remember that I could not keep my seat, whilst I thought the train would never reach its destination. My father was with me, and laughed at my eagerness, and could not understand it. Even then, ancient history, all that belonged to the past, interested me more than any other subject; but my father was essentially practical and unromantic; all his gigantic mind was absorbed in the present. The successful carrying out of a diplomatic mission was worth far more to him than all the antiquities ever discovered. Now I hold diplomacy to be the most interesting life any one can adopt, but it does not prevent a very large portion of my heart from being amongst the ruins and remains of Ancient Egypt. See there."

He pointed to the distance. We had just steamed past the station of Toukh and the far-off outlines of the Pyramids were visible. Behind them rose the Libyan hills, whilst to the east we traced the undulations of the Mokattam or Arabian chain. We were too distant to form any estimate of the size of the Pyramids, but at a first glance we felt a little disappointed.

"It is always so," said Osman. "You have heard too much about them, and imagination is unbounded in her pictures. We always fancy things immeasurably beyond what they really are or can be. You will at first be disappointed even in a close view of the Pyramids; but they will grow upon you until at last you will form a true estimate of their immense size and grandeur. There you see the towers of the Barrage."

Two brick towers of modern construction were just visible. The Barrage is a wonderful work, of which the first stone was laid in 1835 by Mohammed Ali. Its object was to keep the waters of the Nile at the same level throughout the year, thus giving greater fertility to the Delta and decreasing the cost of labour and irrigation. From defective architecture the work proved unsuccessful, and for many years the Barrage did more harm than good; but engineering changes have

been introduced, and in time to come its object may be completely fulfilled.

And now one object after another began to come into prominence. Upon the Mokattam hills uprose the citadel, and behind it, a landmark for the whole country round, the wonderful though modern mosque of Mohammed Ali, with its minarets, so tall and slender that you would think the first strong gale must bring them down. Yet they will doubtless weather many a storm and see out many a generation.

As we approached Cairo, the scene altered. The long sweep of country, the fertile plains of the Delta, were exchanged for cultivated gardens and magnificent residences, conspicuous amongst them the palace of Shoobra with its wonderful avenue of sycamores.

"And there," said Osman, pointing to the left, "lie the ruins of Heliopolis, though its solitary obelisk is not visible from the train. You will visit it one day, and the ostrich farm not far from it And now my work commences. The Khedive awaits me anxiously; I must repair at once to the palace."

"Do you make a long stay in Cairo?" we asked.

"Exactly one week; then back to Constantinople. The Khedive is as amiable as he is talented. Have you ever been introduced to him —in England or elsewhere? If not I am sure I might venture to present you, if you cared for the honour. He is very fond of the English, and in many ways is high and noble minded. No one knows him better than I. But we shall meet again in Cairo. Here we are at last. Did you ever see such a scene of confusion?"

It was indeed almost a tumult: dragomans, drivers, hotel commissionaires, all apparently in the greatest state of excitement, ready to tear each other to pieces in their eagerness to secure passengers.

We had engaged Aleck for a week as our dragoman, and he had gone before us by the night train, in order to meet us on our arrival. There he stood, amongst the crush, tall, dark, swarthy, ready to knock down any dozen people who stood in his way. As soon as he caught sight of us, he simply plunged through the crowd, scattering it right and left; and in a few moments, and in some magical way never quite understood, we found ourselves without the station, driving rapidly into the far-famed City of the Pyramids.

SONG OF THE SEASONS.

Sing! sing of the birth of Spring,
Bluebells, and violets, and may!
Pale sweet primroses blossoming
Down in the leafy way—
Dreams and hopes as light as the bloom
Drifted on orchard grass—
Spring! re-risen from winter's tomb—
Spring that must die, alas!

Sing of Summer, a splendid song,
Summer royally fair—
When nights are white, and days are long,
And the jasmine scents the air.
When the nightingales sing of love,
And the red red roses blow—
These are the notes to make music of!
Ah, that Summer must go!

Make a song for the Autumn pale!
Gather the dead red leaves,
Catch the sob of the winds that wail
Over the lost gold sheaves.
Weave them into a song that sighs
Over the days gone by—
Sing to silence the heart that cries
"Even Autumn must die!"

Sing of the Winter! of ice and snow,
Woodlands dreary and bare,
Haunted by ghosts of flowers that will blow
When the Spring shall be there!
"When the Spring shall be there!" At last
Joy through the song rings clear;
Winter too shall be over and past—
Past—and the Spring be here!

E. Nesbit.

A FALSE ALARM.

I.

IT was a wet autumn day. Since early morning the rain had been beating against the stone mullioned windows of Rawnsley Grange with unrelenting fury. The wind was howling down the chimney and under the ill-fitting old doors with a sound suggestive of the depth of winter.

"If this goes on much longer I shall commit suicide!" exclaimed Mrs. Rawnsley, looking out of window for the tenth time in the vain hope of seeing a break in the clouds. She was young, and very pretty, though at the present moment her eyes were full of tears, and her whole person expressive of the deepest dejection. A stranger might have imagined that she was the victim of a life-long sorrow, but in reality her depression was entirely due to the fact that she had passed a very wet morning by herself.

"What can that be? Surely I heard the sound of wheels?" she cried suddenly. "Robert must have changed his mind again and come home! What can have happened?"

Mrs. Rawnsley hurried into the hall just as a shabby old fly drove up to the door. A gentleman enveloped in a heavy fur coat jumped out and rang the bell. She stopped on seeing that the new arrival was not her husband, and was retreating towards the drawing-room, when she was arrested by the sound of a well-known voice.

"Phil!" she cried, running forward with outstretched hands, "I can't believe my eyes! Why I thought you were in Paris!"

"So I shall be to-morrow," replied the young man, who with the help of the servant was struggling out of his many wraps. "I only came over to England on business, and finding that I had to wait a short time at Bogford I took a cab and drove over to see you for half an hour."

"Half an hour!" reiterated Mrs. Rawnsley blankly; "why I hoped you had come on a visit."

"Very kind of you, my dear Isabel, but it is quite impossible! My work compels me to be in Paris to-morrow evening at the latest."

Then they both burst out laughing. Mr. Philip Digby was attached to the British Embassy in Paris, and at one time his duties had appeared mainly to consist in escorting his pretty cousin Isabel to balls, and providing her with the most splendid bouquets that could be procured for money. But a great many things had happened since then.

"Do you know I have not seen you since your wedding-day?" observed Mr. Digby, as he carefully selected the largest and softest armchair and drew it close to the drawing-room fire. "I suppose

you have forgotten that winter in Paris? Why, it must be nearly two years ago!"

My dear boy! I have forgotten nothing that happened during that delightful time. Ah! that is the place to enjoy oneself!" and Mrs. Rawnsley sighed softly. Although married to a man she adored, and mistress of a charming old manor-house within a mile of the most desirable cathedral town in England, she still looked back to the old Paris days with a faint tinge of regret. There were undoubtedly solid advantages about the present, but it lacked the merriment of the past.

"Now don't waste time," she continued, "but tell me about all our friends. First of all, who has succeeded to my place in your affections?"

"Ah! that would be too long a story! You have had so many successors! But I will do my best to give you a sketch of my latest conquests," said Mr. Digby, twisting up his little black moustache. He was very handsome in a miniature style and deliberately affected a self-complacent manner which some people declared intolerable.

Half an hour was gone long before the cousins had exhausted their numerous topics of interest. Suddenly Phil looked at his watch and jumped up with an expression of annoyance.

"I shall miss my train, if I don't look out," he said, "for that old horse goes like a snail. Good-bye, my dear Isabel. So glad to have seen you installed in your home. Very nice for those who like old oak wainscotings and lattice windows. I can't stand them myself, but I believe I am peculiar. By-the-bye is Rawnsley about? Perhaps it would be civil to tell him I'm here!"

"He is away," said Isabel, stiffly.

Mr. Digby responded to this announcement with a little gesture of amusement.

"How long have you been married? More than a year? A bit tired of it at times, arn't you? I know I should be, so I leave well alone. Here—you must see me off at the door; it's the least you can do when I have come all this way to see you. Beastly climate, isn't it? You had better follow me back to Paris and make acquaintance with the sun again."

"I wish I could," sighed Mrs. Rawnsley; "but I am afraid it is impossible."

"Oh, I don't know; stranger things have happened. Mind, I shall be only too happy if at any time you *can* manage it," said Phil, carefully lighting his cigar before stepping into the fly. In another moment he was out of sight.

II.

The empty drawing-room looked more dreary than ever when Isabel returned to it alone. She sank down on the sofa with a groan of utter weariness, and buried her face in her hands. However, hardly had

she settled herself to cry comfortably, when the door burst open, and in rushed a girl in a dripping waterproof.

"My dear Isabel! What are you doing?" she panted, pulling off her wet gloves and throwing her cloak in a heap on the floor. "I do believe you have been crying! No wonder, left all by yourself in this miserable weather. I call it a horrid shame of your husband to go away like this! I know I wouldn't stand it!"

Miss Julia Grant was a very downright young woman, and prided herself on speaking out her mind without any regard to conventionalities. At one time she and Isabel had been inseparable companions, but the marriage of the latter had produced a slight breach in their friendship, although they lived at no great distance apart. Mr. Rawnsley was many years older than his wife, and a man of quiet literary tastes. From the first he had taken great exception to Miss Grant's manners, his enmity dating from his wedding-day, when she had playfully slapped him on the back coming out of church. It was one of Julia's little failings that she never could quite discern who appreciated these light-hearted habits and who regarded them with intense aversion.

"Well, my dear Isabel," she continued, throwing herself into the armchair lately vacated by Mr. Digby, and planting two dripping boots on the brightly-polished fender, "you don't look very festive, I must say! Evidently you are feeling thoroughly low by yourself in this wretched weather. Now I have a capital plan to propose. We came into Bogford by train this morning, as the horse was lame. Mamma was going to lunch at the Deanery and pay calls all the afternoon, so I just ate a bun at the pastrycook's and walked off to see you."

"You walked in all this rain!" interrupted Mrs. Rawnsley, with astonishment.

"Yes—don't I look like it?" replied Julia, glancing down at her steaming boots. "Well, I can't stop long; I'm in a desperate hurry—in fact, I ran most of the way, and didn't even wait to ring the door-bell. I want you to come back with us this evening and stay a couple of days, to help in some theatricals we are getting up in the village—an impromptu affair, but it will be great fun, as we have lots of jolly people coming. Now make up your mind at once! It's perfect nonsense moping here by yourself when your husband is away!"

"I should like it of all things," said Mrs. Rawnsley undecidedly; "only I don't quite know when Robert returns. I expected him to-day, and then he sent a telegram to say he wasn't coming. He has gone somewhere to consult some authority on something, and I don't know how long it will take him."

"Surely he was away last time I came over?" interposed Miss Grant.

"Ah, yes! You know he is writing an encyclopædia, or a dictionary, or something of that kind, and all his time is taken up going about verifying facts."

"Isabel," said Miss Grant, solemnly, "you're a fool!"

Mrs. Rawnsley only smiled. She was too well-accustomed to her friend's forcible language to take any offence.

"Yes," continued Julia, with great energy, "you are a perfect idiot if you submit to being treated like this! Just show your husband that you intend to enjoy yourself, irrespective of him, and he will think twice as much of you. Why, he was attentive enough when you were first married, until he found out that you would stand any amount of neglect. Now, take my advice for once! Come and enjoy the theatricals without bothering your head whether he comes home or not. It will be a capital joke, and just give him a lesson! He will be more careful how long he leaves you alone another time."

"I hope I shan't make him angry," said Mrs. Rawnsley. "I wouldn't do that for the world! I know he doesn't mean to neglect me. It's only that tiresome old book——"

"Angry!" interrupted Julia. "Well, if you are too afraid of him for a little joke of that sort of course there's nothing more to be said. But I didn't think he was such a tyrant as all that."

"Don't talk nonsense!" replied Isabel hotly. "Of course I am not afraid of him. I shall come to the theatricals—that's settled. You are going back by the 5.20 train? I will meet you at the station; or rather, you had better wait and drive there with me."

"I can't do that," said Julia, tugging on her half-dry gloves. "I must do a lot of shopping before I start, but I shall expect to see you at the station. Mind, we shall never forgive you if you throw us over at the last. No! don't ring for the butler to let me out, I hate the pompous old brute! Here, this is the quickest way," and she threw open the window and stepped out, regardless of her friend's cry of dismay as all the small articles on the drawing-room table blew on to the floor.

Left to herself, Isabel's courage rather failed her. It was the first time that she had ever acted independently of her husband, for she was devotedly attached to him, and inordinately proud of his literary attainments—in spite of the disrespectful way in which she alluded to them before Julia. She had never suspected before that she was in the least to be pitied, and it was quite a new light to her that her friends regarded her as a victim. The weather was intensely depressing, and the sight of Philip had brought back a train of old associations.

"What a merry life it was in Paris!" she thought, "and how I used to be petted and spoilt! No end to the pleasures and excitements of those days! Rather different from sitting all alone, hour after hour, in this gloomy old house, with no companions but the mice scampering about behind the wainscotings." The memory of the mice decided her. "It's really too bad of Robert to leave me," she said. "I can't stand another evening alone with the mice!" And, ringing the bell, she hurriedly ordered the carriage without allowing herself the time to change her mind again.

III.

"ARE we to expect you home to-morrow, ma'am?" inquired the butler, as he held open the carriage door. "And is there any message for the master if he returns whilst you are out?"

"No, none," said Mrs. Rawnsley shortly. "I may return to-morrow, but it is improbable. To the station now," and she jumped into the brougham and pulled up the window with childish petulance.

"Horrid old man!" she thought; "I won't gratify his curiosity to know where I am going! What a bore old family servants are! They always seem to have an impression that they ought to be informed of one's plans directly they are made. Stokes is always interfering, and I really believe he has never forgiven me for destroying the bachelor establishment over which he had presided for so many years. As for leaving a message for Robert, I fondly hope he won't be back before I am, and anyway it would rather annoy him to hear that I had gone to the Grants'. He certainly is a little unreasonable about poor Julia! Of course she is rough, but how kind it was of her to tramp all that way in the wet merely because she thought I was lonely! No! I can't give up such an old friend just because of Robert's fancies, and he will quite understand how the sudden plan came about when I explain it to him myself. I daresay he will think it an excellent joke!"

Unfortunately, Mr. Rawnsley took quite a different view of the case when he returned home on the following day. In vain he looked in every direction, as he approached the house, expecting to see his wife anxiously awaiting his return on the doorstep, as she had invariably done on former occasions.

"Where is your mistress, Stokes?" he inquired as the old servant took his hat in the hall. "She is quite well, I hope? Nothing the matter?"

"Not that I know of, sir! She left home yesterday."

"Left home!" interrupted Mr. Rawnsley. "What do you mean? Where did she go?"

"That's just what we none of us know, sir."

"But when does she return? Surely she left some message for me?" said Mr. Rawnsley with growing anxiety.

"She left no message, sir, and didn't say anything about coming back. She didn't even take the maid, and directly the porter took out her luggage at the station she told the coachman to go home, so he couldn't even see by what train——"

"That will do," interrupted Mr. Rawnsley harshly; "no doubt it's all right, and she will be here presently. Dinner at eight, and don't disturb me in the library until then unless your mistress arrives."

It is to be doubted whether Mr. Rawnsley accomplished much work that afternoon, although he covered his writing-table with formidable looking volumes and conscientiously tried to master their contents.

In spite of all his efforts to fix his attention, his eyes were perpetually wandering to the face of the clock, his ears continually straining to catch the sound of a light footstep that never came.

However he successfully dissembled his anxiety before the servants, and when Stokes came to ask if dinner should be kept waiting, he affected to look up from his book with a start, as if unconscious of how the time had passed.

"I will have dinner at once. Your mistress must be coming by the last train. Order the carriage to go down and meet it, and tell the housekeeper to have something ready for her about eleven o'clock," he said, speaking with more certainty than he felt. But on no account would he have betrayed the slightest uneasiness about his wife's movements.

"Besides she *must* be coming home to-night," he argued to himself, "or she would have written to me. She may have left a note that has been mislaid; there is sure to be some very simple explanation of it, after all."

When dinner was over he again made a pretence of continuing his work in the library, but it was with difficulty that he could keep up even a show of interest in his studies.

"It's strange how I miss Isabel's presence in the room," he reflected. "There was a time when I could work so much better by myself, and now I feel as if I could not settle to anything until I see her there," and he glanced at a low chair by the side of the fire which was his wife's favourite seat during the long evenings when he was absorbed in his writing. Often he did not speak to her for hours, and no one would ever have suspected how constantly his eyes rested for a moment in admiration on the little golden head that nestled back so gracefully amongst the cushions. Isabel herself always believed that he forgot her very existence when occupied with his books, but that, she imagined, was a penalty inseparable from marrying a husband much cleverer than herself. And of course he never undeceived her. It was enough to have electrified all his friends by suddenly marrying a pretty child of twenty without making himself still further ridiculous by an unlimited display of affection. To do him justice he never suspected that Isabel would have preferred more demonstrative behaviour. She never complained of feeling dull, and it struck Mr. Rawnsley for the first time that evening that it must be rather dreary work for a young girl to sit alone night after night, in that gloomy old house, when he was away from home. He quite resolved to be more sociable in the future, to leave her less to herself, if it were compatible with his other plans. And when she came home—which would be very soon, for the mail was due in five minutes—he would put away his books and try to take an interest in what she had been doing. It was very inconsiderate of her not to be there to meet him, but he would pass that over with the slightest possible reproof in his pleasure at getting her safely back again.

So he fidgeted about the room, comparing his watch with the clock, and referring anxiously to Bradshaw to be sure that there was no mistake about the train, until at last it was impossible to buoy himself up any longer with false hopes. The mail had gone up full half-an-hour, the carriage had long since driven round to the stable yard, and yet there were no signs of Isabel. A chill foreboding of evil began to creep over him.

IV.

After a time the sound of shuffling footsteps and whispering voices in the passage aroused Mr. Rawnsley from his melancholy reflections. In the stillness of the night he could hear a muffled controversy going on outside the door. He felt a conviction that he was about to receive bad news, and, sitting down by the writing-table, he prepared himself to hear the worst. There had been an accident, and Isabel was killed. He felt as certain of it as if he had seen her dead body lying before him. And, at the same moment, by a curious freak of fancy, he remembered how lovely she had looked when he met her for the first time at a ball to which he had been unwillingly persuaded to go. How gracefully she danced, and how she enjoyed herself! Her face had struck him as the very impersonation of childish mirth. He had never seen her dance since—for they were married a few weeks later—and he had made her clearly understand from the first that his time was too valuable to be wasted in going to parties.

The door opened softly. Mr. Rawnsley looked up and saw Stokes gliding forward with an air of suppressed excitement.

"The carriage went down to the station, sir," he began, "and there was no one there. The coachman made inquiries, but nothing had been seen of the mistress since she left. So when I heard that, I talked it over with the housekeeper, and we both agreed that it was my plain duty to tell you the truth. At least, in my opinion, it's always a woman's place to break any bad news, but Mrs. Light seemed to think it best for me to undertake it, having lived so long in the family——"

"Speak out at once!" interrupted Mr. Rawnsley. "Say what has happened and go!"

The old man came a few steps nearer. His face was very pale, but he was evidently taking a certain grim pleasure in having such an unwonted opportunity of producing a sensation.

"Well then, sir," he began, "if you will have the truth, the mistress has gone to Paris!"

"To Paris!" echoed Mr. Rawnsley, blankly. "What could she want there? It's quite impossible that she would start on such a long journey by herself!"

"But you see, sir, there was the gentleman."

"What are you talking about, Stokes?" said Mr. Rawnsley, sternly.

"You must be mad or drunk! There has been no gentleman here."

"Indeed, then, there has!" retorted the butler, casting aside all reserve in his haste to vindicate his character. "Any of the servants will tell you how a gentleman drove up to the door yesterday about an hour after your telegram came. The mistress seemed wonderfully pleased to see him—at least she ran out to the hall almost before he was inside the door, so that it was easy to see she expected him. And then they were very merry. Why, I could hear them laughing whilst I was cleaning the plate in the pantry! But when he came to go it was a very different thing. She had her handkerchief up to her eyes as she went back to the drawing-room; I saw it myself!"

Mr. Rawnsley was more than ever puzzled by this information.

"Who was the gentleman?" he inquired, after a moment's thought.

"Well, indeed, sir, I can't tell; for the mistress met him in the hall before I had time to ask his name. But he was rather a foreign-looking gentleman, with a little black moustache, and I believe she called him Philip or——"

"You can stop!" thundered Mr. Rawnsley, suddenly. He recognised the portrait at once. Nothing could have annoyed him more than to hear of Philip Digby's presence in the neighbourhood. He disliked him particularly, and always felt vaguely irritated at the excellent terms on which he stood with Isabel. It was simply wonderful how she could tolerate such a young man—the very antipodes of her husband.

"But why do you tell me all this rubbish?" he continued irritably. "I don't want to be disturbed at this time of night with long stories about strange gentlemen. It doesn't concern me in the least."

"It does indeed, sir! It goes to my heart to tell you, but the truth is sure to come out. She has gone off with him!"

The old man paused, expecting an outburst of rage at this announcement. Finding his master remained quite silent he continued with apologetic eagerness:

"I ought to have told you before, sir, but I was afraid, and that's the truth. First, I noticed how sad she seemed at his going, and then I made a pretence of finding the carriage rug when they were parting in the hall, and I heard her promise to follow him to Paris as soon as she could get ready—that I'm ready to swear to. And then when she ordered the carriage and started off without her maid, and wouldn't leave any message with me—why then I went to the housekeeper and——"

"Stop!" interrupted Mr. Rawnsley, in a voice that caused the butler involuntarily to retire towards the door. "No more of these lies. You leave my house at once, and never let me see you again. Go!"

As he spoke he started up with such a menacing gesture that Stokes turned and fled without venturing another word.

When the door closed behind him, Mr. Rawnsley sank down in his chair. For some time he was too confused to be able to think clearly over what he had heard.

"How is this?" he exclaimed at last with a forced laugh. "I must be labouring under some delusion to attach any importance to the spiteful words of a jealous old servant, and yet, what can have become of Isabel? She *must* have left some message for me. It is too strange that she should have gone away without a word!"

He walked uneasily up and down the room several times, trying to hit on some satisfactory solution of the mystery. Presently he stopped in front of his wife's work-table and opened the drawer thinking it possible that he might come across something that would give him a clue to her movements. The first thing he took out was a French novel with Philip Digby's name scribbled on the cover. A piece of paper was stuck between the pages as a marker. He tore it hastily out; it was only an empty envelope with the Paris postmark.

With a smothered imprecation he dashed the book and paper on the floor and resumed his weary walk.

"Ah, it's all very well for the master to talk about lies," Stokes was at that moment saying to a sympathetic circle in the housekeeper's room, "but he wouldn't be half so angry if he thought they really *were* lies!"

V.

The Grants' theatricals were great fun—such fun that Isabel felt compelled to stay for the second night's performance which was to be followed by a dance. Once away from the depressing, atmosphere of Rawnsley Grange her spirits rapidly rose, and she soon forgot all her former scruples.

"After all," as she said to Julia, "it's Robert's own fault if he comes home and finds the house empty. If he doesn't take the trouble to tell me his plans he must put up with the results, and it won't hurt him to spend one evening by himself. I only hope he will find the mice better company than I do!"

So she gave herself up to the full enjoyment of the cheerful party and returned home the day after the dance, feeling more light-hearted than she had done for months.

"It's wonderful how a little festivity brightens one up," she thought as she walked to the door. "I must really persuade Robert to take me about rather more instead of devoting all his time to his books. I am sure it would do us both good. I feel perfectly different from what I did the other day!"

However, no sooner had Mrs. Rawnsley entered the house than her spirits were damped by perceiving that something was amiss. There was a general air of confusion that was hardly to be explained by her somewhat sudden appearance after so short an absence. She noticed

that Stokes was not in his usual place, but concluding that the old butler had treated himself to a holiday, she good-naturedly resolved to ignore the fact and proceeded to elicit what information she could from the other servants.

"So your master came home yesterday, after all! Well, that is vexing! And where is he now?"

"He started again by the first train this morning and went to town," replied the housemaid who was being interrogated.

"Indeed! And he did not mention when he was coming back? How very strange! I suppose he was called off for business!"

Isabel passed an uncomfortable evening, wondering every hour if her husband would return, and whether he had left home in annoyance at not finding her there to meet him. Fifty times already she regretted having gone to the theatricals. There was an oppressive air of mystery hanging over the house for which she could not account. The servants crept about and whispered in corners, and she constantly caught them staring furtively at her when they thought her attention otherwise engaged.

It was a positive relief next morning when the old rector came after breakfast to talk over preparations for the coming school-feast. His conversation was not particularly exciting, but at all events he looked her straight in the face and spoke without any signs of embarrassment.

"By-the-bye, I saw Mr. Rawnsley in London yesterday," he said, as he rose to go. "I had gone up to consult an oculist, for I positively am growing so blind that I can hardly see to read. And as I was saying, I met your husband at the station—on his way to Paris, he told me. Going for a change, I suppose? Well, I expect he wants it, for I thought him looking very ill. I told him he ought to take you abroad to look after him, and he only laughed; but I don't consider it any laughing matter. I didn't like his looks at all, myself. I wonder you don't feel anxious about him, starting on such a long journey when he seems so unwell. However, I suppose he won't stand much interference after having his own way for so many years."

And with a chuckle at his little joke the old gentleman took his leave.

With a great effort Isabel repressed all signs of astonishment at this unexpected news. She would not for worlds have let any one know that she was ignorant of her husband's plans. At first wounded pride predominated over all other feelings. But gradually the information struck her in another light. The rector had dwelt much on Robert's altered appearance. What if he had suddenly been taken ill and was at that moment being nursed by strangers in a foreign town! The very idea threw her into a perfect frenzy of anxiety, and without pausing to consider any possible difficulties she determined at once to follow him to Paris.

She hastily threw a few things into a portmanteau whilst her maid

looked on paralysed by her mistress's unwonted energy, and collecting all the loose money that was in the house, she started off. It was a new thing for her to undertake a long journey alone, and she was exceedingly vague about the probable cost of tickets and various other small matters of detail. But with indomitable perseverance she consulted time-tables, and questioned porters, so that on the following morning she found herself alighting, weary but triumphant, at the Gare-du-Nord.

VI.

Now that she was in Paris she felt that all her difficulties were over. It was true that she did not know her husband's address, but she had quite arranged what to do. Philip Digby was certain to be at home at that hour in the morning and possibly he could give her news of Robert. Even if he had not met her husband he was so clever and good-natured that she felt the utmost confidence in his powers of putting everything straight. It was an intense relief to feel that she had finished that awful journey at last. In spite of her fatigue she thoroughly enjoyed the drive through the familiar streets. Each turning in the road awakened fresh memories of the days when life was nothing but a continual round of pleasure and excitement. As she was leaning forward to look at some favourite shop she caught sight of a man driving rapidly in the opposite direction who reminded her strangely of her husband. She called to the driver to stop, but before he understood what she wanted the other carriage was out of sight and she concluded that she must have made a mistake.

"After all, I should not be very likely to meet Robert the moment I arrive," she thought; "though it might have been him. Perhaps he didn't recognise me. How funny that would be! The looking-glass in the waiting-room showed me what a fright I looked, but I didn't know that I was past recognition! If there is nothing the matter, how I shall be laughed at for dashing over like this! Probably Robert only came to Paris to visit a library, or something of that kind, and his ill-health merely existed in the rector's imagination. I wish I had thought of that before! However, it's too late to go back now, for here is the Rue de l'Echelle and Phil's rooms. I wonder if he will be up yet?"

As Mrs. Rawnsley was inquiring of the concierge if her cousin was at home, an elderly gentleman came down the stairs, and, hearing her question, stopped short and addressed her in French.

"I am afraid you cannot see Mr. Digby to-day," he began; "he is ill, and, though it is nothing serious, I cannot have him disturbed or excited."

At this totally-unforeseen difficulty, Isabel's philosophy quite gave way. A sudden feeling of utter abandonment came over her, and without speaking a word she burst into tears.

The doctor looked at her attentively.

"You are alarmed about Mr. Digby," he said; "that is quite unnecessary. He has been rather badly wounded, but, with careful nursing, he will be all right again very shortly."

"Wounded!" echoed Isabel. "But what has happened?"

"A quarrel with a compatriot, I believe," replied the doctor. "It might have been very serious, but the bullet lodged against the shoulder-blade, and we have been able to extract it without much difficulty, so now there is no further cause for anxiety."

"But surely I can see him for one moment," urged Isabel. "I am a near relation, and have just come from England——"

"Ah!" interrupted the doctor, "that rather alters the case. You are probably Mr. Digby's sister? Well, if you will promise to be very calm, very collected, I will permit you to pay my patient a visit; but mind, no tears, no excitement! He is doing very well now, but we must not risk anything."

With repeated promises of obedience, Isabel followed the doctor to the door of the sick-room. Here he summoned the nurse.

"I give this lady permission to see your patient for a minute," he said, "on condition that he is kept perfectly quiet. You quite understand that your brother's health depends on his not being excited?" he added, turning to Isabel. "Very well, then; I will leave you, as I have appointments elsewhere."

It is to be feared that Mrs. Rawnsley hardly carried out the doctor's directions as they were intended.

"My dear Phil! How silly you are! How can you do such things?" she exclaimed, as soon as she caught sight of her cousin.

He was lying back on some pillows, very pale and bandaged, so that he could not move, which gave him rather a ghastly appearance.

"Poor fellow! You do look bad," she continued. "Don't try to speak; the doctor said you were to keep quiet. I can't tell you how sorry I am to see you like this, both on your account and because I wanted you to help me find Robert."

Mr. Digby gave an almost imperceptible start.

"What!" cried Isabel, "have you met him by any chance? Or perhaps he has been to see you? I don't know his address, and I am so afraid he is ill! When did you see him last?"

"We parted about seven o'clock this morning," said Philip, with a faint smile. "You needn't excite yourself, he wasn't hurt."

"What do you mean?" interrupted Isabel. "I don't know how he could be hurt. Oh!" she screamed, suddenly grasping his meaning, "you have been fighting with Robert! The last man in the world to do such a thing! Robert fight a duel! I don't believe it! What an excellent joke! Ha, ha!" and she broke into a fit of hysterical laughter.

"I am glad it amuses you," said Mr. Digby dryly. "I am afraid the humour of the situation escaped me at first. Still, as you point

out, it is exceedingly funny, and you have not yet heard the best of the story. I am at present disabled for an indefinite time for having had the temerity to run away with Mr. Rawnsley's wife during his absence from home."

"And Robert really believes it?" shrieked Isabel. "Oh, I shall never forgive you, Phil—never! The absurdity of fancying that I could run away with *you!*"

"Precisely what I told him; but he wouldn't believe it. Now, my dear child, the best thing you can do is to go home and make it up with your husband. He ought to have come to his senses by this time. He was going back by way of Dieppe. At all events, I am sure you will excuse me from talking any more. The doctor hinted at internal hæmorrhage and other stupid consequences if I disobeyed orders, and that wouldn't help matters. I hope you will find matrimony more of a success in the future than it has proved so far." With these words Mr. Digby closed his eyes, and showed such evident signs of weakness that the nurse took Mrs. Rawnsley by the arm and forcibly led her out of the room.

"You must command your emotion or you will kill the poor gentleman," she said with kindly severity. Not having understood a word of the dialogue, she naturally concluded that Mrs. Rawnsley's grief was attributable to the serious condition in which she found her brother. "Here, madame, you can rest quietly and recover your calm," she continued, opening the door of another room.

"I don't want to rest! There is nothing the matter with me!" exclaimed Isabel feverishly. "Please give me a little water and I shall be all right. There," she continued, drinking off a glass of water at one draught, and readjusting her veil, "now I feel quite well. No, I will not take up your time any longer. Go back to your patient." So saying, she ran down the stairs, jumped into a passing carriage, and ordered the driver to take her to the station without a moment's delay.

VII.

It was getting dusk as Mrs. Rawnsley stepped on board the *Ville d'Amiens* at Dieppe that evening. She had no very distinct plan in thus hurrying back to England. Only Philip's last words had suggested the idea that she might find her husband on board, and she now had absolutely no other wish in life than to have an opportunity of explaining the truth to him. It would be so easy to show him how the mistake had arisen; and in the meantime she was still childish enough to feel a good deal of satisfaction at her husband's insane display of jealousy. It was a perfect revelation that Robert could be stirred into doing anything so utterly repugnant to all his principles as fight a duel on her account.

"If he had gone to his lawyer's, I should have hated him," she thought, as she watched the thick autumn mist rolling up over the

water. "But to go straight to Paris and shoot poor Philip on the merest suspicion—oh! he must be much fonder of me than I thought!"

At that moment her eyes fell on a travelling rug which was lying on the deck beside her. Surely the pattern was strangely familiar! She had chosen one like it for Robert only a few weeks before and worked his initials in the corner. And when she looked nearer, there were the great silk letters which she had embroidered with a jesting allusion to his careless way of losing all his smaller possessions on a journey. So he was somewhere on the boat.

The idea made her heart beat so fast that for some minutes she could not move. Presently, however, the thought that she might again miss him braced her up to make an effort. Rising from her seat, she began a careful scrutiny of such of the other passengers as she could see sitting about on deck. Before long she recognised her husband standing apart from the rest, staring gloomily out into the darkness. In spite of his grey hair, and severe expression, he was incomparably better-looking in her eyes than Philip, towards whom, at that moment, she felt a somewhat unreasonable animosity. Without allowing herself the time to feel nervous, she walked up and touched her husband on the shoulder.

Mr. Rawnsley started and looked round.

"I am so glad I have found you at last," began Isabel, but at the sound of her voice he turned deliberately away.

"Oh, Robert! Please stay! I must tell you!" she cried, catching him by the arm and beginning to sob hysterically. She had intended to make a calm explanation which would carry conviction at once, but she was worn out with fatigue and his look of aversion completely broke her down. "It was all a mistake," she gasped. "I went to see Julia Grant, that was all! It was indeed! I never even thought of Philip after he left! He would tell you so himself!"

"Probably!" sneered Mr. Rawnsley, "as he swore you were in England when I saw you myself driving about Paris! But it is sheer waste of time your making assertions, as unfortunately I cannot believe them after what I have seen. No! it is perfectly useless discussing the subject," he continued, cutting short Isabel's exclamation of horror. "You must see for yourself that there is nothing more to be said." And without glancing at his wife he walked away to the other end of the boat.

Mrs. Rawnsley was thunder-struck at the serious turn things had taken. She had fancied that it would be so easy to make everything clear at once, and now by her own confusion she had made the case more involved than ever. Her head was aching so that she could hardly think, and feeling more dead than alive she crept off to her cabin and sinking down on a sofa, sobbed herself to sleep.

She was awoke by a fearful crash. For a moment she lay still,

wondering if anything had really happened, or whether it was only another bad dream rather more vivid than its predecessors. Then the shouts and screams on all sides convinced her that there really had been an accident. The door was flung open and the steward called to her to get up at once. There had been a collision in the fog it seemed, and the *Ville d'Amiens* was struck hard and was beginning to sink.

Isabel hurried on deck. Here all was a scene of wild confusion in the indistinct light of early morning. Everybody appeared to be crowding towards one point where a boat was being filled with the few women and children on board. Isabel stood rather aloof from the struggling throng. She was unaccustomed to fighting her way in the world and felt too spiritless to assert her own claims to attention.

"Are they all in? Stop! Here's another lady!" shouted a sailor, catching sight of her at the last moment.

Mr. Rawnsley, who was trying to make some of the more excitable passengers listen to reason, turned round at these words.

"Good heavens!" he cried, rushing towards his wife, "I thought you went in the first boat! Come! They are just starting."

"Are you coming?" she inquired without moving from her place.

"Presently, but now there is only room for one—be quick!"

"I shall not go without you," she replied quietly. "I mean it," she added as he tried to drag her forward. "There! it is no use. Some one has taken my place and the boat is full."

"Do you know that you have thrown away your life?" said Mr. Rawnsley roughly. "That is the last boat, and unless the vessel that ran into us is in a condition to help there is no hope."

"How long will it be before we sink?" asked Isabel, calmly, though she could not repress a slight shiver at the cold fog that hung round them like a pall.

"It is impossible to say for certain. Half an hour, perhaps, or even less. It can't go on long!" cried Mr. Rawnsley, throwing his arm round his wife as a violent jerk almost dashed her against a mass of splintered wood.

"If that is all, it hardly seems worth while to quarrel for such a short time, does it?" said Isabel, gently. "You can surely trust me to speak the truth now?"

All her nervousness had vanished in the presence of a tangible danger, and in a few words she told him the whole story.

"You see, I did nothing worse than go to the theatricals without permission," she concluded, with a faint smile. "You believe me now, don't you? Here—I still have one of the programmes in my pocket."

"No—don't show it me! I need no proofs! I must have been mad ever to doubt you!" replied Mr. Rawnsley, drawing his wife still

nearer to him as a huge wave broke over the deck. The injured boat seemed to stagger under the weight of water as if she could hardly right herself after the shock.

"This can't go on long," muttered Mr. Rawnsley, hoarsely. "It is coming now, and I have murdered the one creature that I cared for above all others!"

"Don't say that," whispered Isabel, burying her face in her husband's arms as the deck reeled under them. "Perhaps it is best as it is. If we had lived you might fancy something else another time. I am not frightened, but please hold me close, so that I may not see it coming!"

VIII.

TWELVE hours later two people were seated on the balcony of an hotel overlooking the sea. After a long silence the man turned to his companion with a look of extreme anxiety.

"You look tired. Are you quite sure that you are none the worse for all you have gone through?" he said, gravely.

"No!" replied the girl, with a merry laugh. "I tell you I have not even a cold. When my maid arrives with some clean clothes, you will confess that I never looked better in my life. One can't expect to look smart in a dress that has been soaked with salt water."

"At all events," insisted Mr. Rawnsley, "you must be careful of yourself after the exposure and fatigue of such a night. It was a very near thing. If the other vessel had not been able to get us off at that moment——"

"Don't talk about it," said Isabel, quickly. "I thought I shouldn't mind dying, but now I know I would rather live. And we will go home and be happier than we have ever been before. You must even forgive poor Stokes," she added, "for I should like everybody to be as happy as I am. After all, he meant to act in your interests."

"Since you can forgive me, there is no reason why I should not forgive Stokes," replied Mr. Rawnsley, gently pressing his wife's hand. "But I think you will agree with me that such a faithful old servant had better be allowed to retire on a pension."

It is unnecessary to add that Isabel joyfully acquiesced in this arrangement.

MRS. PICKERING'S VANITY.

By Ina Garvey.

OLD Mr. Hudson had retired from business some years ago. His business had been that of a dry-salter, and he had understood it so well as to make a fortune at it. Before retiring from business as a dry-salter, Mr. Hudson had, if we may be permitted the phrase, retired from business as a husband. Mrs. Hudson had died in all the fresh enjoyment of her carriage and her silks and her jewelled brooches and bracelets, leaving her husband, as his sole companion, a little sickly boy of half-a-dozen summers.

For a good many years after retiring from business, John Hudson ruffled it with the best; visiting about, entertaining in grand style his many friends, travelling abroad, and enjoying to the full the riches he had toiled for. His only child was sent in due course to Eton, and thence blossomed forth into a second lieutenant of a smart cavalry regiment.

But at length old Hudson's holiday after toil showed signs of drawing to a close. His health began to break, old age was coming upon him; the pleasures that his money had brought him, eating and drinking, riding and driving, sitting in fine rooms, being treated with deference, and sometimes even with servility, buying costly treasures of art, would be pleasures no longer. He had done his work, he had had his day. "The account was about to be closed, at no distant period would come the long dreamless sleep," said old Hudson to himself as he crept up and down the sunny path of his highly ornate garden, and mused on the great mystery of life and death.

Realizing that his part on the world's stage was played, and resigning himself to old age and invalidism, he dismissed a great part of his large staff of servants and shut up most of the showily furnished rooms in his great new house built after the style of a celebrated Roman villa, and standing on the breezy heights of a favourite London suburb.

The servants who now formed the old gentleman's reduced establishment were—Simon Pickering, a personal attendant ("gentle, patient, and experienced with the old and with invalids," said his testimonials) who had replaced the smart valet of more vigorous and fashionable days; the said Simon Pickering's wife, a plain-featured woman approaching middle age, who discharged the now not very heavy duties of cook and housekeeper; a couple of housemaids, and a coachman, who did little save exercise his horses daily, his master having grown partial to the gentle movement of a Bath-chair.

A neighbouring medical man, who had often been a guest at Mr.

Hudson's table, would drop in from time to time in an informal way, but the invalid resented the notion of seeming under a doctor's care and of being thought seriously ill. True he had had a stroke of paralysis, but people sometimes lived for years after that if they were careful and kept quiet; and he was inclined to be impatient with his son when the latter, now Captain Hudson and quartered in Dublin with the 14th Canterers, appeared at Highstead on short leave, having heard of the sudden failure of his father's health.

On a golden, mild autumn afternoon; Captain Hudson had returned to Dublin, and Josiah Hudson, leaning on the arm of his attendant, Simon Pickering, moved slowly along his smoothly gravelled garden-path. London lay below, softened by distance and sunshiny haze into a silent dream-city.

"Pickering," said old Hudson, after contemplating the scene for some time, "my sands are running out. Have you ever thought of Heaven, and wondered what it will be like?"

"I can't say as I've thought much about it, sir," answered the attendant respectfully; but he gave his master a searching glance, for the question and the tone in which it was asked constituted, he considered, a new symptom.

"Don't you think it will be something like that?"—and the old man pointed to the prospect beneath them. "See! It might almost be the New Jerusalem that the Bible speaks of, with its golden streets and gates of pearl!"

For a few minutes the old man stood looking silently at the scene, his thoughts full and sad; then he turned and leant yet more heavily on the arm that supported him.

"Take me in, Pickering; I'm afraid I've caught a chill."

Late that evening Pickering sat watching by his master's bed-side. One of the maids had been sent to Dr. Page's to ask him to come round, as Mr. Hudson was "not so well." She had come back with the information that Dr. Page was out just now, but would come as soon as he returned.

Pickering sat by the bed where the feeble old man lay in a restless feverish doze, and wondered whether this "bad turn" his master had taken would prove fatal.

And while he so wondered, and while the clock in the passage ticked loudly through the silence, and an occasional ember fell all too noisily from the fire, the old man's eyes opened and looked at the figure seated beside him; but his mind, it seemed, was wandering, and he thought he was looking at the son who had left him a week before.

"Humphrey, I'm glad you're there, Humphrey," said the ex-dry-salter, picking at the bed-clothes with his hot, eager fingers. "I dreamed you'd gone back to your regiment; I'm glad you haven't. I wanted to tell you, Humphrey, that there's money in the house—more than is prudent, and you'd better bank it again. It's a matter of a thousand pound in notes; I drew it out because I meant to

attend a sale at Christie's and pick up some treasures, but I was taken ill, and there the money is. It's in the secret drawer of the cabinet over yonder; you know how to find the secret drawer, Humphrey, don't you? Open the second drawer with the smallest key of the bunch I always carry about with me—take the drawer right out, and feel about at the back of its space till you feel a tiny knob the size of a pin's head, press that, and a little drawer will spring out at the side—put your hand in it and feel about on its roof till you find a tiny roughness, press that, and another little drawer will spring out at the back, and in that is the thousand pound. Go and get it now, Humphrey," said the sick man, his voice sinking to an excited whisper; "it's not safe there! the cabinet might be carried off and broken up. I don't trust the servants; I don't trust Pickering; he's skilful and gentle, but he's a cunning eye—and I don't trust his wife! Get it out, Humphrey, boy, and bank it—or we may both be murdered." His speech grew wilder and more incoherent after this—his manner more feverish and excited. Ten minutes later Dr. Page's ring was heard at the door.

Josiah Hudson never rallied from that "bad turn." Dr. Page remained with him through the night. Just at the approach of dawn, when life is lowest, another and severe "stroke" descended on the feeble form in the bed. He lay in a living death, silent, motionless, unconscious, until after the hurried arrival of his son, and then passed into a world where his real estate and his personalty availed him nothing.

On the evening after the funeral, Captain Hudson sat deep in conversation with Mr. Lincoln, the family solicitor, in the smoking-room of Highstead Villa.

"The bank tells me he drew out a thousand pounds in notes a fortnight ago," the captain was saying in a low, discreet voice; "but there's no such sum in the secret drawer of his cabinet, where he always kept any considerable amount of ready money that he had in the house. He was in the habit of attending Art Sales at Christie's, and would draw out large sums for that purpose. If this thousand was drawn with the intention of attending the last sale, and he was prevented by his illness from going to it—why, then, I suppose a pretty big robbery has been 'committed!' Of course the bank has the numbers of the notes, but we can't stop them on a supposition—for my father *may* have drawn out the money and paid it away on some private business that we don't know of."

The lawyer shook his head.

"We should have found some memorandum of such payment among his papers. It is my firm conviction that Mr. Hudson drew the money out with the intention of attending Christie's last sale, and was prevented by his increasing illness—that, in his failing state, he did not put the money in a sufficiently safe place (unless, indeed, one of the

servants has discovered the secret drawer of the cabinet), and that the thief and, as yet, the money, are under this roof. This man, Pickering," and the lawyer's tone dropped still lower: "what is known of him?"

The captain shrugged his shoulders. "He came to my father some months ago with a character that gave him all the cardinal virtues—in short, he seemed the very man old what's-his-name in ancient times was always looking for with a lantern! His wife was engaged at the same time as cook-housekeeper; I know nothing against her—except the worst that can be said of a woman—she's uncommonly plain!"

The solicitor mused in silence for a time. "And you tell me they are leaving here for another situation the day after to-morrow; the best thing you can do is to have a detective up from Scotland Yard to-morrow morning."

It was the night following that on which Captain Hudson and the solicitor had conferred together. Simon Pickering and his wife were in the housekeeper's room sacred to the latter, and had, as was evident from the appearance of the table, been enjoying a snug little supper. They were now seated one at each side of the fire, and Mrs. Pickering, having thrown a cotton wrapper round her shoulders, had taken down her abundant dark hair and was brushing it at her ease. The late Mr. Hudson's cook-housekeeper was a woman of rather unusually plain face, and was, therefore, perhaps inclined to be the more vain about, and careful of, her one little gift to her. So she sat brushing her generous allowance of fine dark hair while she looked into the fire with knitted brows and face of deep cogitation. Her husband watched her with evident anxiety as to the result of her musings. Presently, after going to the door—for the third time within ten minutes—ascertaining that no one was listening outside, re-closing it, and returning to his chair, Pickering leaned across the hearth and addressed his wife in the very lowest tones of his soft voice.

"Yes, we must hit on some way, *at once*, of smuggling the notes out with us to-morrow morning. If we can't hit on some plan of the kind, they'd best go into that fire *direct!* This detective that's been here to-day (for that's what he is—I spotted him at once!) will have all the servants searched, of course; and *we* shall be searched just as we're ready to start—that's their intention. So set your wits to work! It would be a pity to burn a thousand pounds! I don't know as I should have done as I did, only I was so sure of your help. Women are always to the fore in a shady business."

"And men are always ready to make use of us in such business, and lay all the blame on us afterwards," rejoined Mrs. Pickering with some asperity. Then, after a pause, she rose, looked at herself in the little mantel-glass, and, twisting her hair into deep, old-fashioned rolls on each side of her face: "How should you like me in this style, Pickering?" she asked nonchalantly. "It's not fashionable, but it's becoming."

Simon Pickering stamped his foot and clenched his hands. "D'you want me to go distracted?" he said; but his voice did not get imprudently loud though his rage was great. "To talk about the fashion of your hair at such a time! There's a thousand pound at stake, woman, and the chance of ten years' hard labour. If you was handsome it would be maddening enough to hear of your vanity just now; but being what you are——"

"Yes, I think it would suit me very well," said Mrs. Pickering to herself, still calmly reviewing her reflection in the glass; "I'll change the fashion of my hair from this very night, and wear it in rolls."

Simon Pickering was right in his prediction. Immediately before departing to the new situation which they professed to have obtained, the late Mr. Hudson's attendant and his wife, as also the rest of the domestic staff at Highstead Villa, were searched. Their boxes stood ready, and they had just taken an early breakfast, when the Scotland Yard functionary and his female assistant presented themselves. The Pickerings submitted with cheerful readiness to the process. Mrs. Pickering and the female searcher withdrew, and, on their reappearance in ten minutes' time, the cook-housekeeper's pleasant manners seemed to have won sensibly on the stern policewoman. Their boxes were turned out, but yielded no more proof of guilt than their persons had done. No pretext remained for detaining them. Pickering fetched a cab, the boxes were placed on it, Mrs. Pickering, after adieus to her fellow-servants and a curtsey to Captain Hudson, who happened to pass across the passage, stepped into the cab, her husband mounted the box beside the driver, and the vehicle trundled away down the Highstead Hill, ostensibly bound for Euston Station.

But Inspector Sharpe of the detective force was ill at ease. He did not like to see these people depart in peace, yet he could not detain them. There *might* have been no robbery at all. Old Mr. Hudson *might* have paid away the thousand pounds in private business and left no memorandum of such payment. On the other hand, if there *had* been a robbery, this highly-respectable couple who had just taken their departure seemed to Inspector Sharpe, despite their having come triumphantly through the morning's ordeal, a quarter towards which he would do well to direct his talents. He would like to keep them in view.

To remain at Highstead Villa investigating was, however, also a task much after his own heart. But it was clear he would have to depute another for one or other of these duties.

While he ruminated thus, pacing silently along the lower passages of Highstead Villa, the voices of Rose and Emily, the two housemaids, reached his ears from the kitchen near at hand; he paused instinctively to listen.

"Well, Emily, you and me'll be off in a day or two! I only hope in my next place there won't be no old gentlemen dying, and their

sons going and having the servants searched afterwards as if they'd committed a murder—that I do! It's an insult to honest girls like you and I, that it is!"

A second voice assented with a good many exclamations, and the first voice continued. "The idea of that there Mrs. Pickering having such an amount of vanity! I wonder what sudden freak took her to change the fashion of her hair and wear it in them old-fashioned rolls? To be sure, I think I never did see an uglier woman!"

"She is ugly; and yet she managed to get married, you see!" remarked the second voice.

"Yes," rejoined the other, "that's what always puzzles me! These ugly women always get married, whilst good-looking girls like you and I don't get the ghost of a chance!"

"Speak for yourself!" was the somewhat indignant retort. "*I* could get married to-morrow, if I chose; but I'm hambitious. I must have a husband as'll keep me like a lady. No—I never did see such a fright as Mrs. Pickering looked in them great big rolls of hair!"

Inspector Sharpe passed on silently down the passage, and his musings deepened.

The *Seagull*, a small paddle-steamer belonging to a certain line that plies between the Thames and the Flemish sea-ports, lay at St. Katharine's Wharf, waiting to drop down the river in the early morning. She had taken on her cargo, which, on the return journey, would be replaced by Ostend rabbits. *More* than her cargo the *Seagull* did not expect this wet stormy October night, for, though during the summer weeks a good many passengers crossed cheaply to the Continent by her and her sister-vessels, she had looked for none such for some little time now. The elderly stewardess was therefore a little surprised when, at eleven o'clock at night, as she sat by her bright little fire in the ladies' cabin sipping a glass of something comfortable, and thinking of presently retiring into one of the red-curtained berths that lined the walls, she heard the sound of an arrival above, and a minute later was aware of a solitary lady-passenger being shown down the little stairway into the cabin.

"Pray don't disturb yourself, stewardess," said the passenger, pleasantly. "Remain by the fire and finish your supper, I *beg!*"

The stewardess was at once prepossessed in the new arrival's favour—noted with interest the name "Mrs. Thomson" on the ticket of her bag; and, though forced to own silently that the face disclosed when the veil was raised was not comely, mentally pronounced the unexpected passenger, "Quite the lady!"

The latter threw herself down on one of the faded red velvet seats that ran round the little cabin. "One feels a little strange and lonesome, stewardess, travelling without one's husband," she said; "but I must be brave and resist the temptation to have a regular good cry.'

"Indeed and you must, ma'am!" responded the old stewardess

with ready and officious sympathy, bustling to help her charge remove her cloak and wraps. "Crying doesn't mend matters. Dear sakes alive, ma'am, I've had to do without *my* 'usband for good and all this many a year! Just fifteen year it is since we went pleasuring to Greenwich, and what must poor Tollyfield do but let his legs run away with him down Greenwich hill, and pitched on his head at the bottom, and was took up dead." The stewardess wiped her eyes after this peroration and proceeded to hang up the passenger's shawls. "And how about supper, ma'am? Shall I get you something? To be sure it's very late, and I don't know if——"

"Oh! thank you; I shan't need anything but what I have with me," said the passenger. Accordingly, having eaten one or two biscuits and taken something from a flask, she professed herself ready to go to her berth. "What time in the morning do we start, stewardess?"

"About five, ma'am. Which of the berths will you sleep in? I can recommend *this* one as about the most comfortable. Dear, dear! Three months back there wasn't much choosing of where ladies would sleep, in here! I'd all the berths full, and ladies sleeping all over the floor as well! Dear sakes alive! and the quarrelling that went on! I'd have given up my post many a time, only what can a lone widow with nine children do? Well, I thought I'd done waiting on ladies for this year, to be sure! But I'm always glad to wait on one as *is* a lady, pleasant and kindly spoken!"

The passenger had not yet taken off her travelling cap. She now removed it, showing a fine mass of dark plaited hair, with a deep, old-fashioned roll on each side of the face. In a few minutes, assisted by the assiduous Mrs. Tollyfield, she was comfortably settled in one of the lower berths.

"Thank you, stewardess, I shan't want anything more, much obliged! Oh dear! My poor head aches pretty badly!" said the passenger as she lay down.

"Poor dear creature! Does it now?" responded the stewardess, tucking in the rugs and blankets that she had piled upon her charge. "Headache's bad, sure!—though heartache's worse. You want some good sleep and pleasant dreams about your 'usband that you're parted from, ma'am. But I'm afraid you won't sleep comfortably unless you take down your hair; let me arrange it for you."

The passenger drew her head away with a sudden jerk.

"Be good enough to leave my hair alone!" she said in a stern, threatening manner, very different from her former affability. "I shall do very well and want nothing more."

The stewardess drew the red curtain of the berth and left her. But Mrs. Tollyfield's good opinion of the *Seagull's* solitary passenger was shaken. "A vixen of a temper, for all her pleasantness! The idea of flying out at me like that, all for nothing!"

Thus cogitating the stewardess went to rest.

At five o'clock in the morning there was plenty of bustle on the little deck of the *Seagull*, and enough shouting for an Orient liner. Below the stewardess was busy also, and the one passenger, having just emerged from her berth and put on the few articles of dress that she had laid aside last night, was sitting by the little fire in the ladies' cabin, wrapped in a shawl.

"We're off now, aren't we, stewardess?" she asked with an eagerness that was half involuntary, as she took the cup of tea that had been prepared for her.

"Yes, ma'am, we're off now. Mrs. Tollyfield's tone was a little stiff; she had not quite forgotten the rebuff of the previous night.

Sure enough, they *were* off. The paddle-wheels turned once, slowly, laboriously, with a great deal of churning and splashing; turned twice, more easily and quickly; turned three times; the lady-passenger standing on a seat and looking through a porthole that commanded the farther shore of the river, saw the dingy warehouses begin to slide away.

"Yes, we're off now!" she said gaily, jumping down and coming back to her seat by the fire. But in another moment she added: "We've stopped! What's that for, stewardess?"

The paddle-wheels had suddenly ceased their splashing and churning; the shouting above was more vehement than ever, and seemed to be responded to by shouting from the shore close at hand, then the *Seagull* began to back.

"Something been forgotten," said the stewardess; "and we're returning for it."

The passenger set down her half-finished cup of tea and listened.

The shouting continued, and the little vessel backed to St. Katharine's wharf which she had just quitted.

"Seems to be another passenger coming on board," said the stewardess.

Her companion made no answer, but gazed sternly and stonily into the little fire before which she sat.

A few moments later brisk steps were heard coming down the stairway, and then came a peremptory rap at the door of the ladies' cabin.

"Who have you got in here, stewardess?" asked a man's voice, as Mrs. Tollyfield hurried to the door.

"One lady, sir."

"Ah! that's right," said Inspector Sharpe, stepping into the little room. "Good morning, Mrs. Pickering. You very nearly gave us the slip—very nearly! I've been thinking that that little ceremony that you took part in at Highstead Villa yesterday morning, you and the rest of the household staff, was not quite thorough enough. My female assistant didn't ask you to take down your hair, ma'am, so I've followed you here to get you to do it, if you'll be so good."

Mrs. Pickering looked at the inspector, looked at the wondering

face of the old stewardess. "Well," she said, with a quick deep sigh, "the game's up, I suppose! Five minutes ago I thought I was safe. Bad luck to you, officer, for not giving me the chance of getting clean away!" She paused a moment.

"Will you shake out those rolls, Mrs. Pickering, or shall I?" said Inspector Sharpe.

"Oh! *I'll* take 'em down! It's no good refusing *now!*" She put her hands up to her hair, unrolled it, laid the contents on the table. The detective carefully smoothed the paper out, until ten banknotes lay on the table. The inspector quietly placed them together.

"Ten one-hundred-pound notes make a thousand pounds, the sum missed from the late Mr. Hudson's cabinet. Not a bad notion at all, yours, of concealing 'em, Mrs. Pickering!' I don't suppose any lady's hair was ever more expensively dressed, ma'am! And now, if you'll put your bonnet on, I must ask you to return on shore with me."

Five minutes later the *Seagull* steamed away without any passengers, the stewardess loud in her wonder and her moralisings. "Dear sakes alive! So that was why she kept her hair rolled, and flew out at me last night. And me thinking it was all temper! How we do misjudge people!"

NINETEEN.

I AM filled with vague unrest to-night,
As I sit by my window and watch the light
Grow dim and faint in the western skies,
And my heart beats low and my lips breathe sighs,
For something most precious is floating away,
Just out of my reach in twilight gray.

The last faint beam in the west has fled;
The stars come forth, the day is dead.
The wheels of time roll swiftly on,
And nineteen years of my life are gone.
I call to the sunbeam, "Return, I pray!
You know not what you are bearing away."
But I watch and weep and call in vain—
It will never come back to me again!

WHAT A NAUGHTY BOY DID.

TWO small figures are seated on the turf. The girl is six, and has a solemnly sweet face, enhanced in beauty by a cloudy-lace "Granny" bonnet. The boy is seven, a man-of-war suit being worn with the air of a commander at least, and a frown of mingled perplexity and determination adorning his countenance.

"It's a beastly shame, Dolly! She promised it, and then she locked it up in her box."

"But you were naughty, Rex. You must have been *very* bad," said Dolly, with a reproachful look. "You know cousin Dora *never* breaks her promises."

"Bah! you don't know anything!" cried Rex, contemptuously. "She just wanted not to give it; but I'll have it."

"When you deserve it," remarked Dolly, with grave severity, as she walked away from her cousin to inquire from the old cow-keeper when she could have her glass of new milk.

In the shady drawing-room two widows and three maidens gossiped and drank tea.

The stoutest widow—who had passed all the rubicons which now divide youth from age, and really knew she was old, and allowed her silver hair to shine in its native colour—enjoyed her tea and listened to the conversation, only correcting false reports when uttered.

The other widow was fair and tall, and had no age. Her eyes beamed, her face was carefully preserved, and her slow and graceful movements were always a rest to the eye.

Of the three maidens two were lively ordinary girls, to be met with any day. The other was a dark-eyed, broad-browed girl of three-and-twenty—Dora Morville. There was intellect in her face, and pride stronger than life. She wore a soft creamy dress, and her small feet were just seen beneath it in delicate bronze slippers. She listened to the rattle of the two sisters, Maude and Lucy Truscott, and joined in now and then in a sweet, low voice. Presently Maude said to the younger widow:

"Captain Branscombe has come into a peerage and a fortune. Fancy, after every one calling him such a bad speculation!"

Mrs. Dargrave's face faintly coloured.

"Did every one call him so?" she inquired languidly.

"Why, of course! You know he was avoided by all the chaperons, and a girl he loved gave him up because he was poor."

"Nonsense!"

The word was impatiently uttered by Dora Morville; but when the others looked at her, the face was again calm and immovable.

"I was told so," said Maude rather huffily, and Lucy chimed in

"So was I." "But," added Maude, with a tinge of spite, "I don't know the particulars, for it happened three years ago, and I was in the school-room then—so were you, Lucy."

"Ah, my dears," said old Lady Dearmouth, with her genial far-seeing gaze of kindness, "stories gain in trouble with years, just as people do! I never knew a tale that did not get broader and longer."

"Rover's hasn't," solemnly corrected a small voice, as Dorothy came in through the window—"you know it hasn't, grandma!"

"Dolly, you're a duck!" whispered Cousin Dora, who was rejoicing in the laughter and distraction caused by the child's advent.

"So are you," said Dolly, with an earnest nod. "What makes Rex angry with you?"

Dora collected her faculties.

"This morning Rex would not obey orders; he did something grandmamma had told him not to do. Before he began to be naughty, I told him I would not give him something I had for him if he was disobedient. He *was* disobedient; so I put it away."

Dolly nodded again. That sweet little wise head was always nodding.

"That's quite fair! But," with a pleading look, "Rex is a dear boy when he isn't naughty. Couldn't you help to make him good?"

"I'll try, Dolly," said Dora, softly kissing the little face.

In the meantime a small burglar had climbed the gardener's ladder and got in at Dora's window. Then he walked swiftly to a trunk which he found unlocked.

"This is where she put the parcel—and I think it was a fishing-book," soliloquised the boy. A step sounded in the passage, down dived the little arm into the box, and seized a small brown-paper parcel. Then he crept behind the bed-curtain and waited till the foot-steps echoed on in the distance. After that he shoved the parcel inside his sailor jacket and disappeared from the window, just as an arrival of visitors to stay in the house created a diversion which prevented his being seen. He could not get a chance of examining his treasure then, for nurse called him to tea.

"Coming," he shouted, but sped first to a summer-house where he climbed up the wood-work and hid the parcel in the ivy.

Dolly was waiting to accompany him to the nursery.

"Rex, some gentlemen have come to stay. One *is* so nice!"

"I saw him—a big man with a beard!" said Rex. "That's papa's friend, Captain Branscombe."

"He's called *Lord* Branscombe now," corrected Dolly.

This did not interest Rex. He ran on to get his tea, and met Dora on the stairs. She put her hand on his shoulder, and said, "Rex, come and see me after tea."

A little defiant face looked up at her, and then without answering the boy brushed past.

"Oh, Rex, you are a rude boy!" said Dolly reproachfully, and she would not sit beside him at tea, as a punishment.

Dora Morville passed slowly along the broad staircase, and when she was on the last step but one, halted suddenly and turned pale. Two gentlemen had just emerged from the library—one a quick, clever-looking man of forty, Rex's father and Lady Dearmouth's only son—the other Lord Branscombe. With an effort Dora recovered her usual graceful ease.

"Ah!" said Sir Edward Dearmouth, "I am glad to find you still staying with my mother, Dora. You know my old friend Branscombe, I think."

Dora bowed and held out her firm little hand, looking for a second into the face that strove to appear as unconcerned as her own. It was two years since they had met, and Lord Branscombe had not been in England since. A careless eye would not have thought any warmer feeling than friendship had ever existed between the two.

"It is almost time to dress for dinner," said Dora, as the two young ladies, Maude and Lucy, emerged from the drawing-room, and took careful notes of the group in the hall; "but I have come for my work-basket." She passed on into the room, and the others dispersed. Then she went to one of the open windows and stood until she felt sure of herself.

"I never thought it would be like this," she reasoned, with hands tight clasped, and big tears gathering. "I thought the pain was past!"

The large drawing-room lay in dim light behind her, and pale stars were twinkling in the evening sky. How she longed to stay there, and dreaded the dinner and the glare of lights!

There was a little figure watching outside—it was Rex. He was trying to make up his mind to tell her he was sorry, and to give back the parcel he had hidden, when the sight of her tears made him pause. While he was pondering Dora escaped to her room, from which she emerged only as the party were moving in to dinner.

The graceful widow engrossed Lord Branscombe, and looked her best. Dora was pale and silent; but that the other young ladies regarded as an advantage, for their own pointless remarks gained more attention than usual. A young squire, a grave curate, and an old General, who was evidently smitten with Dora, completed the party. In vain the veteran soldier endeavoured to interest Dora, and she had been so amiable to him at a tennis-party only three days before, that his feelings were almost as hopeful as the ardour of youth could have made them. Once or twice the kind eyes of Lady Dearmouth rested anxiously on her loved young grand-daughter—the orphaned child of her favourite daughter who had been dead many years. She had guessed at a sort of attachment between Dora and the Captain Branscombe of two years ago, and now that they had met again under her roof could not but notice the constraint of the girl's manner. Beneath

the well-bred, pleasant indifference with which Lord Branscombe conversed with the fascinating widow, Mrs. Dargrave, Lady Dearmouth detected unrest also. It was a relief to her when dinner ended, and early in the evening Dora excused herself for her paleness and dulness, saying she had a headache ; and availed herself of her grandmother's gentle suggestion that she should go to her own room. So when the gentlemen came in, Lord Branscombe's eyes roamed with an unsatisfied look over the group of ladies, and the old General was uncomfortably disappointed for the rest of the evening.

Next morning Rex sought Dora directly after breakfast in the pretty morning-room, where she had just settled herself to embroider some useless but ornamental present for her grandmother. Dora looked up brightly at the little fellow who was a pet of hers. The rain was pouring in torrents against the window, and she knew Rex was hard up for amusement when he could not get out.

"Well, Rex, come and have a chat."

The boy satisfied himself that no one else was in the room, then said in a low voice :

"Cousin Dora, I am sorry I took the book."

Dora looked up surprised.

"What book, dear ? "

"Why, the fishing-book."

"What *are* you talking about ? I've got it here ! " and Dora dived into her work-basket and brought from beneath a heap of silks a paper parcel very similar to the one Rex had taken.

The child stood amazed.

"But you put it in your box, and I took it out of your box while you were at tea yesterday."

"Rex, how dared you go to my box ? " said Dora, with a flash of her eyes that made her little cousin thoroughly ashamed. "Besides I always keep it locked. Where is the parcel ? "

Between sobs Rex answered—

"The box wasn't locked, and I did take a parcel, and I hid it in the summer-house down by the copse, and I took the string off it, but I thought I wouldn't open it till I'd told you. And I wanted to tell you before dinner last night but you were crying in the drawing-room window."

"Hush, Rex ! " said Dora hastily.

"You *were*, I say ; I saw your eyes all wet."

"Where is the parcel now, Rex ? " asked the girl, as calmly as she could.

"Why in the summer-house, and it'll all get wet."

Dora rose and went to her room, where she looked in the box, and missed something which caused her to clasp her hands and turn pale. Then she glanced out at the pitiless rain, and taking down a waterproof proceeded to equip herself for a journey.

On the stairs she met Rex.

"I'm going to find what you took away, Rex. Tell me exactly where you put it?"

The child minutely explained, and after saying a few words, calculated to convince him that he had acted very dishonourably, Dora left him with hanging head and tears of shame in his eyes.

Now, directly after breakfast, Sir Edward Dearmouth was called into consultation on business matters by his mother, and Lord Branscombe donned a stout ulster and went out for his morning smoke. He walked in a leisurely way far from the house, to the amazement of the gardeners, who were all taking shelter in hot-houses and conservatories, with a praiseworthy dread of inconvenience in the present and rheumatism in the future.

Having reached the wilderness part of the grounds, Lord Branscombe found himself by the notable summer-house, where the children were generally the only visitors. Sundry wheel-barrows, carts and horses, and other toys lay untidily about, and amongst them fluttered certain white bits of paper. A blast of wind and rain drove the explorer under shelter, and as he looked down amused at the improvised stable under the seat, where a patient wooden horse stood with his head in a very full bag of corn, his eyes fell upon his own name, before he had his present title, written on the back of a damp-looking letter. In much astonishment he lifted it, and found it had never been opened, although it had passed through the post to what had been his home in an uncle's family. Recognising the writing, Lord Branscombe's hand trembled as he tore it open. As he read it a flush rose to his forehead. It was a letter he had longed and waited for in vain two long years ago. Why had it not reached him, and whence came it now? Excitement filled his mind, and his eyes wandered round the children's play-house in search of some clue. A wet bit of brown paper fluttered under the seat near the patient horse, and on looking closer several letters were visible. They were all open, and addressed to Miss Morville. Two in his own writing. What he had once written he felt he might read. One was full of anxious tenderness and a desire to overcome some trifling coldness that had arisen from a misunderstanding with the girl he loved. The other—by heavens, he never wrote *this!* White with indignation he read, in letters so like his own he could scarce have known them apart—

"Dear Miss Morville,—I here return unopened the letter you have done me the honour to write. Circumstances have arisen which render it clearly impossible for me to continue any correspondence.

"Truly yours,

"G. Branscombe."

He looked up with wrathful gaze just as the wet umbrella of Dora Morville was thrust under the cover of the summer-house.

Her face was as pale as his, and indignation made her voice tremble, as she held out her bare hand from under her cloak, saying, "My letters, Lord Branscombe!" in as imperative a voice as she could muster.

"This is yours," he answered in a pained voice, handing her one of the two she had supposed to be written by him; "the other is a forgery; and this letter addressed to me I see now for the first time!"

The dark eyes of the girl were raised in speechless wonderment. She trembled, and reached out a hand to support herself against the side of the arbour. Both her hands were seized, and Lord Branscombe bent his head in earnest supplication.

"Child, child, can you not believe me? Treachery has done its work for two years, but will you not trust me now? I have never swerved in my love, though the letter I now hold never reached me, and it was to have been the sign between us of reconciliation."

Lower and lower drooped Dora's dark head. The rain poured on, but the lovers heard it not. Pride and doubt melted away, and complete happiness held sway. In the house were cries of "Where is Dora?" and presently when she came in, Rex, who had earnestly watched for her, intercepted her in her headlong rush to escape meeting any one.

"Why, Dora, what a time you've been! Couldn't you find the parcel?" he said, anxiously regarding her.

"Yes—yes, dear; I found it."

"Then it's all right, I suppose? You aren't angry any more?" and the boy's wistful, wilful eyes peered wonderingly into the changed face before him.

"Not angry, Rex," she answered, stooping softly to kiss him. "I am so happy, I must forgive you!"

"That's right," cried Dolly, who followed Rex upstairs, "now we'll be jolly again. But, cousin Dora"—and the sweet face was full of earnest inquiry—"what makes you so happy just when Lord Branscombe is? I heard him tell grandma he was 'awfully glad' of something."

"Go and find a fishing-book for Rex in my work-basket," said Dora, in a half-stifled voice, for she was between tears and laughter. She stood to watch the two little cousins rush eagerly to the room where her work-basket had lain since morning, then obtained a few minutes of quiet realisation of recovered happiness before luncheon.

Lord Branscombe had told her with sorrow and shame that he believed the writer of the letter forged in his name to be one of his own cousins, who for reasons of her own desired to separate him from Dora. His lips were sealed by regard for family honour, and so the plotting and treacherous young lady only met her punishment. But it was a hard one, when she read of a joyous wedding to a description of which the *Morning Post* devoted half a column.

The nice old General read his fate in the happy consciousness of

Lord Branscombe and the blushing Dora. So did the fascinating Mrs. Dargrave; but it is not certain that her suave powers may not soften fate yet, for there are those who say she is catching the old General's heart in that happy state known as "the rebound."

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

ONCE ONLY.

ONCE only passeth the soul within life's portal,
Earth-chains to wear;
Once, in the dawn of an infant life, yet mortal,
Man taketh share.

Once, childish joys, with a child's light toiling earned,
All stainless seem;
Once, the drear lesson of sorrow, sorely learned,
Ends childhood's dream.

Once only—ay, but for once—we wholly love;
Heart into heart
Pouring the wealth of its God-gifts from above,
Love's holier part.

Once only—thus it may chance—our love is dumb,
Withered, or slain.
Then once we cry to the heavens, "Shall it come
Not once again?"

Then roll the wearier years—the long cold years
Till the death-call
Whispers its half-dreaded joy through mortal fears
Once, unto all.

Once only passeth the soul beyond life's prison,
Earth-chains to sever;
Once only breaketh the Day—and light is risen
Once, and for ever.

OSBERT H. HOWARTH.

"MRS. CLEMSON HAS TOLD ME ALL ABOUT YOUR ILLNESS," SAID MRS. WARRINER

THE ARGOSY.

OCTOBER, 1892.

A GUILTY SILENCE.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MARGARET'S RETURN.

MR. and Mrs. Bruhn did not return from their wedding-tour till the middle of February. They set out with the intention of being away three weeks, but did not come back till the end of as many months. Mr. Bruhn was weaned from business habits and business thoughts in a way that he would not have believed possible previous to his marriage. Old artistic instincts that had slumbered for years woke to sudden life when he found himself among the galleries of the Continent, with leisure enough to enjoy their beauties, and an appreciative companion by his side. To Margaret, that three months' journey, the bourne of which was Rome, was like one glorious dream. After her long years of poverty, of intellectual hunger, of soul-wearying drudgery now in one school-room, now in another, it was as the lifting of scales from the eyes of one long blind. She felt as though she had never really lived till now. To be able to journey from one famous spot to another, and have sufficient time to see everything that was noteworthy in each, yet not staying long enough anywhere to wear off the delicate edge of novelty, would, in any case, have seemed a privilege to Margaret. But to be able to do all this with the aid of every appliance that refined wealth knows so well how to make use of, was something that in former days might just have tinged her wildest dreams, but had not the faintest touch of reality in it. Yet now it had all come to pass!

Rome was the crown of Margaret's dream. After a month spent in that city of great memories, there crept over her a desire to wing her way back to the happy English nest which she knew was awaiting her. Brook Lodge would call her mistress, and she had a consciousness which she did not try to disguise, that the position would become her well.

They journeyed homeward by easy stages. During her absence from Helsingham, Mrs. Bruhn had heard frequently from her sister, and also from Miss Easterbrook; but no word respecting what had

befallen Esther Sarel had been permitted to reach her. Mr. Bruhn, on reading the details of the case in the batch of local newspapers which reached him while he was at Paris, had at once written privately to Miss Easterbrook, and also to Trix, requesting that in their letters to his wife no allusion whatever should be made to the wretched affair; and he, on his side, took care that no newspaper containing any mention of it should reach Margaret's hands. He knew of his wife's liking for Esther, and he judged that the tidings, whenever they should reach her—and sooner or later they must do so—would prove a great shock to her, and cause her much distress of mind; and, having determined in his own mind that his wife's wedding-tour should be a season of unalloyed happiness, as far as it lay in his power to make it such, he tried his best to keep her in total ignorance of Esther's sad fate, and succeeded. Margaret came home with the full expectation of being greeted both by her sister and by Esther Sarel immediately on her arrival.

It was nine o'clock on a frosty February evening when Mr. and Mrs. Bruhn alighted at the Helsingham station. Margaret's heart gave a throb of exultation as she stepped into the close carriage that was waiting for them, and was shut in by the obsequious footman. But she did not forget to give one wistful glance round the platform, half expecting, perhaps, to see some familiar face waiting to greet her; but there was no one whom she recognised.

"Home at last," said Mr. Bruhn, pressing his wife's hand fondly as they were being whirled rapidly through the streets of the little town.

"Home at last," echoed Margaret; and tears of happiness came into her eyes as she thought of all that those three little words implied to her.

How familiar and yet how strange looked the well-remembered shops and streets as she saw them through her tears!—the same and yet how different! There, at the corner of Clemson Row, was the very archway under which she had taken shelter one wet evening only a few months ago, when she had come out without her umbrella, and had not sufficient money in her pocket to pay for a cab. While now—! Well, Heaven had been very kind to her, and had given her far more than she deserved. This was the thought nearest her heart when the carriage passed through the gates of Brook Lodge.

Two minutes later they were at the house itself, where, in the well-lighted hall, housekeeper and waiting-maids and footmen were all waiting to receive and welcome their new mistress. Mrs. Bruhn accepted their respectful greetings with the stately courtesy that became her so well. Then turning to the housekeeper, she said, "Is not my sister, Mrs. Randolph, here? Did you not send her the message?"

"The message was sent, ma'am, not five minutes after we received

your telegram, but word was brought back that Mrs. Randolph was out of town."

"Out of town!" said Mrs. Bruhn in surprise; adding to herself: "Probably Trix has gone to Wellingford to see papa. But I wish she had been here." Then she said aloud, "Send Esther Sarel to me. I wish to go to my room."

"Esther Sarel, ma'am!" exclaimed the housekeeper. "Have you not heard what has happened to her since you went away?"

"I have heard nothing. To what do you refer?"

"You are speaking of Esther Sarel," said Mr. Bruhn, coming up at the moment. "Yes, I have ill news for you respecting her. Come with me in here," he added, taking her into a side room. "The matter is a disagreeable one, and I would not mention it to you while we were away for fear of spoiling your enjoyment. But now the news can be kept from you no longer."

"Yes, yes,—but what is it that has happened?" said Margaret anxiously.

"She was convicted within a week of our going away of stealing a letter from the post-office—convicted on her own confession—and sentenced to four months' imprisonment."

The room was only partially lighted, but Mr. Bruhn could see the deadly whiteness that crept over his wife's face as she listened to his words. She gave a little sigh when he had done, and would have fallen to the ground had he not thrown his arms round her in time to prevent her. He carried her to the sofa, and rang the bell violently. "Your mistress has fainted," he said to the housekeeper who came in. "This news about the girl Esther Sarel has been too much for her."

Consciousness came back to Margaret after a time. She opened her eyes and gazed dreamily around. Her husband was holding one of her hands, and looking fondly down upon her. A faint, wintry smile flickered for a moment over her face as her eyes met those of Mr. Bruhn. "Is it all true what you told me about Esther? or did I only dream it?"

"It is quite true, Madge, dear, I am sorry to say."

"Send that woman out of the room," she whispered. Then, when the housekeeper was gone, she added, "Sit down close by me, and tell me how it all happened."

So Mr. Bruhn sat down beside her, and still holding one of her hands in his, he narrated to her such particulars of the affair as he had gathered from the newspapers. "But the strangest feature of the case," he went on to say, "seems to me to lie in the fact of the letter having been hidden away in a secret drawer in your casket. She must have lighted on such a hiding-place by accident when cleaning the casket, or examining it out of curiosity. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, by accident, certainly," assented Margaret huskily.

"The fact of choosing such a place in which to deposit the letter betrays, to my thinking, an amount of cunning on her part that could hardly have been expected by any one who knew her. The only good feature of the case seems to me her frank confession and instant acknowledgment of her guilt the moment she was charged with having stolen the letter."

"Who was it, in the first instance, that so accused her?"

"Dawkins, the superintendent of police. When your stolen casket was taken to him at the station, he, too, discovered the secret of the false bottom, or secret drawer, or whatever it was; and there he found the letter, which he knew, from other sources of information, to have been stolen. He at once went up to Irongate House, and there, confronted with the girl Sarel, he was not long in eliciting the truth. By the bye, Madge, dear, it would have been a curious thing if they had accused you of purloining the letter, as they might not unreasonably have done, seeing that it was found hidden away in a piece of your property. But forgive me! I see that I have pained you."

"No, no! It is Esther, poor child, for whom I am pained," said Margaret, squeezing her husband's hand. "Tell me again. What did they do to her? What sentence did they pass upon her?"

"She was sentenced to four months' imprisonment."

"To four months' imprisonment! Poor, poor child!" Margaret lay back, with shut eyes, and a face as white as that of some marble effigy on a tomb, brooding in silence for several minutes over the news just told her.

"Robert," she said at last, turning her black eyes full upon her husband, "I want you to do me a favour. I want you to procure me an order of admission to see Esther to-morrow."

"The county goal, Margaret, is not a place to which I should like you to go, even as a visitor. The girl's term of imprisonment will be at an end in about three weeks; had you not better wait till that time, and see her when she comes out of prison?"

"Oh, Robert! I cannot wait; I cannot let a single day go over without seeing her. The girl has neither father nor mother, has no one in the world but me who will interest themselves about her. I must see her to-morrow, or I shall never forgive myself."

"Well, dear, since you are so *entêtée* about it, of course I give way, and will procure you the requisite order. I don't know whether you are aware of the fact, but the county gaol is at Ackworthing, twelve miles from this place, and it is there that she is confined."

"Half an hour's journey by rail," said Margaret. "Scarcely so far as going from one end of London to the other."

"There is no railway to Ackworthing," said Mr. Bruhn. "That, however, can be easily obviated by my driving you over in the wagonette."

"You are very, very kind. But I must see Esther alone, abso-

lutely alone. There must be no gaol official by when we meet. That, too, you can arrange for me; can you not, dear?"

"I will try; although a meeting such as you speak of is in contravention of prison regulations and discipline."

"Again, thanks. And now leave me for a little while. Late as it is, I know you have some letters that you want to attend to. I will await your return here; and don't let any of the servants come in unless I ring. I feel one of my bad headaches coming on, and at such times I am best alone."

So Mr. Bruhn, having spread his travelling-rug over her, stooped and kissed her, and then went.

It was not headache, but heartache, that Margaret Bruhn was suffering from. Four months' imprisonment! Those were the words that she kept repeating to herself times without number. She—she, Margaret Bruhn—ought at that very moment to have been in prison, ought to have been undergoing the sentence which another was undergoing in her stead. At the first words of explanation she had comprehended the sacrifice made by Esther; and before the nobility of such an act her own soul seemed to dwarf and shrink into insignificance. What had she done that any one should so sacrifice themselves for her? Nothing—absolutely nothing—save a few acts of charity, such as, in England, are common almost as the sun. But was it not her duty, now that she had come back before the sentence passed upon Esther had been carried out in its entirety, to abrogate that sentence, and set Esther free by confessing that she alone was the guilty person? Clearly that, and that alone, was her duty. But her whole being shrank back appalled at the thought of such a confession. She said to herself that she could decide upon no course of action till she should have seen Esther. If Esther, after what she had already undergone, found the burden too heavy to bear any longer; if, even now, she demanded to be cleared in the eyes of the world; then, in such a case, the fatal confession must be made, and she must take Esther's place as a felon. But, in the event of Esther insisting that her sacrifice should be carried out to the end, and thoroughly accomplished, then—but this was a thought that she would not work out to its issue. The morrow would determine everything. To-night she could do nothing save torment herself with the thought of evils that might possibly never come to pass, or flatter herself with delusive hopes that, even now, the fruits of her one crime would never be brought home to her.

At the breakfast-table Mr. Bruhn set down his wife's pale looks to her headache of the previous night, which she now assured him was quite gone. And, as her eyes were very bright this morning, and her smile seemed to have no trace of melancholy left in it, and as she talked with her usual animation on twenty different topics, he saw no reason to doubt her word; and he pleased himself with thinking that his ill news of the past night had not cut so deeply into her mind as

he at one time feared it would have done. It was arranged that the carriage which was to convey them to Ackworthing should be at the door by one o'clock, and then Mr. Bruhn went about his morning's business. Margaret spent her morning at the piano, playing one elaborate piece after another, as if striving to keep her thoughts from running too persistently in the one channel into which they would keep returning again and again in spite of all her efforts to the contrary.

Mr. Bruhn came in to luncheon at half-past twelve, and when that was over they started. The day was bright and frosty, and under happier circumstances, Margaret would have enjoyed the ride greatly. But how was it possible for her to enjoy it to-day, seeing that every few minutes this ugly question would intrude itself into her thoughts, "Shall I come back with my husband, or shall I sleep to-night in Ackworthing gaol?"

The carriage was left at an hotel in the town, and Mr. Bruhn and his wife took their way to the prison on foot. A hearse-like van, laden with prisoners, drove up just as they reached the entrance. Margaret shuddered as the great gates of the prison opened to receive it, and the dull, heavy clash of bolts and bars as they fell back to their places, sounded to her like the knell of her own doom. The governor of the gaol received Mr. and Mrs. Bruhn with the utmost courtesy, and ushered them into a pleasant little sitting-room. After a delay of five minutes, a female warder came to announce that the prisoner whom Mrs. Bruhn had come to see was waiting to receive her. Margaret left her husband talking to the governor. Mr. Bruhn told her laughingly to be careful that she did not get locked up by mistake, and that he should not give her one second over half an hour without going in search of her.

What Mr. Bruhn had told his wife with respect to the sentence passed upon Esther Sarel was quite correct. At the sessions she pleaded guilty, and was sentenced to four months' imprisonment. Miss Easterbrook and Mrs. Randolph had been twice to Ackworthing to see her. They were her only visitors, and they had seen her merely in the regulation-room, with an iron screen between themselves and her, and a prison matron within hearing of every word.

To Esther the prison had not seemed so much a place of punishment as a refuge. Having confessed to the world that she was guilty of a certain crime, she wanted, for a time at least, to escape from all in that world to whom she was known. She had bruised her soul, and she hungered for quiet and solitude till she should have healed herself in some measure of her hurt. She cried a little when they cut off her hair, but after that time, whatever she might suffer in secret, none of the prison officials ever saw her otherwise than sedately cheerful, and anxious to fulfil, to the minutest letter, the simple prison tasks that were set her to do. It was a great relief to her, as her mind then was, to have everything arranged for her, after the orderly

prison fashion which knows no change from one year's end to another; to be told when she must eat and when she must work, when she must get up and when she must lie down; to be, in short, relieved from the care and responsibility of her own actions, and have merely to obey the will of others. And Esther found that to obey well was all that was demanded at her hands, and that every one treated her with as much kindness as the discipline of the place would admit of, when they perceived how ready and willing she was to carry out all the stereotyped rules, and that no violent outbreak or breach of prison decorum was to be apprehended at her hands. Her utter seclusion from the world, and the quiet, orderly mode of her life, had not been without their effect upon her wounded spirit, soothing and calming it, and lifting her thoughts above the petty troubles of this life to a contemplation of that higher life which seems so far away amid the din and clamour of the world, but which is yet so close at hand that any one who wills may touch it. That deepest wound of all, the one caused in her heart by the desertion of Silas, was still very, very tender, and often bled afresh in the dim watches of the night, when she could not sleep, and all the vast prison was silent as a grave. Then it sometimes came to her to ask herself why she had done this thing, why she had irretrievably shattered her own life to save that of another? and at such times her anguish was almost greater than she could bear. But the dawn always came with healing on its wings; and she would arise, and begin the duties of another day with the spirit of self-sacrifice strong upon her; feeling steadfast in her belief that what she had done was the right thing for her to do, and that none other was possible.

Mrs. Bruhn, when ushered into the room where the prisoner was already waiting to receive her, stood for a moment or two in mute surprise, scarcely believing that it was Esther Sarel whom she saw before her. The prison-dress, the close-clipped hair, and more than all, perhaps, the changed expression of the face—spiritualized by trouble, refined by sadness—caused Margaret at the first glance to mistake her for a stranger. But Esther's voice broke the spell.

"Miss Margaret!" she said, and it was Esther's smile that accompanied the words.

Then the door of the room was quietly shut, and the two women were left alone.

"Yes, Esther, it is I," said Mrs. Bruhn, and the heart-weary sigh that accompanied the words told Esther more than the words themselves.

Esther came forward, still smiling, and would have taken Margaret's hand and have pressed it to her lips. But Margaret wound her long, slender arms about the girl, and pressed her to her bosom, and kissed her twice upon the forehead very tenderly.

"Oh, Miss Margaret, you must not do that!" said Esther, her face all blushes.

"Must I not?" said Margaret sadly. "You are right, child; there is pollution in the kiss of one like me. Hush! Not a word. I know what you would say. Once I was your mistress, and you were my servant. Granted. But now you have lifted yourself to such a height above me that I can never hope to be your equal. I have put manacles on my soul, and made a slave of it for ever."

Esther began to look frightened, and as if she thought Margaret was going out of her mind. "Be not afraid, dear, I am not quite mad yet," said Mrs. Bruhn with another caress. "Or, if I am, there's reason in my madness, though you, simple heart, may fail to see it." Then, holding Esther out at arm's-length, she looked at her slowly from head to foot. "And this is how *I* shall look to-morrow!" she said.

"You, Miss Margaret! Great Heaven! You will never look like this!"

"Esther, I did not know anything of this business till late last night. They had kept it from me, out of kindness, as they thought, not knowing what a fearful interest I had in it. You have been shut up here for the last three months, while I have been leading an ignorantly happy life far away. And oh, Esther, I was so happy! Really and truly happy, almost for the first time in my life. But I lost no time, did I, dear, in coming here after they told me? And now I am ready to take your place."

"To take my place, Miss Margaret! I do not understand you," said Esther in a tone of dismay.

"And yet my words are simple. You, who are innocent, have borne my burden long enough. Cast it off. Let me take it upon my own shoulders from this time forth and for ever."

"Hush! Miss Margaret. Pray do not talk in that mad way," said Esther with lowered voice. "Who knows but that these walls may have ears? For my sake, do please be more careful."

"For your sake!" said Margaret with a bitter smile. "For your sake I ought to proclaim the truth aloud to the four corners of the earth. Esther Sarel, what have I done that you should take the burden of my guilt on to your shoulders and blast your own good name for ever?"

"What have you done, Miss Margaret? You have done that for me and mine that I could never forget were I to live a thousand years. At last an occasion came for me to show my gratitude. I accepted that occasion, and I am—here."

"What I did for you and yours was merely what five Christians out of six would do for any one in need of it. What you have done for me is something that cannot be measured by the rules of common gratitude; something—oh! I am at a loss for words;" and she beat her foot impatiently on the floor.

"Please do not speak in that way of what I have done," said Esther sadly. "It seems far more to you from the height at which

you look down upon such things than it does to me who was differently brought up My time here will soon be over now, and in a month or two it will all seem like a dream of the past."

"Oh! that I could look upon it in that light!" said Margaret.

"Please to try, Miss Margaret, and you will soon do so."

"But I want you to understand, Esther, that I have come here to-day with a definite purpose—with the intention of proclaiming your innocence and my own guilt."

"Oh, Miss Margaret, but you must do nothing of the kind," pleaded Esther earnestly; and tears came into her eyes for the first time that day. "To do that would render what I have done of no avail, and do no good either for you or me. The worst of it is past and gone, and what is yet to come matters little. Think, Miss Margaret, think! To go through it all again! Why, it would kill you and kill me too. I know you would die, and I—my heart would just break!"

"Hush, child, hush! You don't know how your words stab me. Heaven help me! for I am very, very weak."

"Then, consider again, Miss Margaret. You are married now. Your husband—"

"It was of him I was thinking more than of myself," said Margaret.

"You *must* think of him. You *must* save him at every risk," pleaded Esther. "All that you have to do, Miss Margaret, is just to hold your tongue. Everything will then go on in proper course. I shall leave this place in three weeks, and will at once set out for a part of the country where I am unknown. The secret will rest between you and me alone, and you may be sure that I will never divulge it. Only do this, and you will save your husband's happiness and your own good name at the same time."

"Esther, Esther! you tempt me beyond my strength," said Margaret, with a wan smile.

Esther was about to enforce her plea still further, when a knock was heard on the door, and next moment the head of the matron was intruded into the room. "Madam, the time was up five minutes ago," she said, in the most respectful of tones; and she ranged herself inside the room close to the door. "Be silent for your husband's sake," whispered Esther, with her finger on her lip.

It is possible that the matron was slightly scandalized when she saw the fashionably-dressed Mrs. Bruhn fling her arms round the prisoner's neck and kiss her as affectionately as though they were sisters; but, if so, she kept all tokens of surprise to herself; and next moment Mrs. Bruhn passed swiftly out of the room, and was received in the corridor by a second matron, who conducted her to where her husband was waiting her return.

CHAPTER XL.

MISSING.

Mrs. Bruhn pleaded a headache to her husband as they left the prison after her interview with Esther Sarel, and all the way home she lay back in the carriage with shut eyes and white face, communing darkly with herself. Over dinner she so far schooled herself as to chat quietly on sundry indifferent topics; but when the meal was over, and Mr. Bruhn gone to the mill, she went off at once to her own rooms, and did not issue therefrom till a late hour next morning.

She came down feverish and unrefreshed. All through the dark hours she had seen a vision of Esther Sarel in her prison dress, with close-cropped hair, locked up alone in a little white-washed cell, and it was a vision that banished sleep. If for a moment or two she fell into a half sleep, it seemed to her that it was she, Margaret Bruhn, who was the locked-up inmate of the cell, that Esther was the gaoler who had her in charge, and that from some strange middle distance her husband looked on with an approving smile, and seemed to felicitate himself on being well rid of such a wretch. But when she woke up with a start from these and such-like distempered fancies, Esther's pale earnest face and melancholy eyes rose before her again, as they really were, and her soul was made bitter with remorse.

To this feeling, which did not leave her as the night left her, but pursued her through the day, a new and terrible anxiety was quickly added.

Her sister was missing from home.

To Margaret it seemed somewhat strange that neither her sister nor Dr. Randolph was there to welcome her on her return from her wedding-tour, and that no explanation of their absence had been vouchsafed her. But when she had ascertained, from inquiry, that both the surgeon and his wife were out of town, and that no one seemed to know exactly either where they were or when they would return, she concluded that they had suddenly been called away on business of a private nature, and would probably be home again in a few days at the furthest.

The second day passed—that on which Margaret went to Ackworthing—and, much as she longed to see Trix, she was glad to be left alone till her mind should have had time to assimilate itself in some measure to that strange new condition of things which had come about while she was away.

About half-past ten on the morning of the third day Dr. Randolph arrived at Brook Lodge, and was shown into the presence of Mrs. Bruhn. With a little exclamation of gladness, Margaret rose to greet him, but the smile died from off her lips when she saw the utterly-wretched and woe-begone expression of his face.

"Have you seen Beatrice, or do you know where she is?" he

demanded huskily, and he stared round the room as though he suspected Margaret of having hidden away his wife on purpose.

"I have certainly not seen Trix since my return, neither do I know where she is," answered Margaret. "But why do you ask?"

"Because she left her home four days ago, and has not since been heard of."

Margaret rang the bell peremptorily. "Send to the mill and tell Mr. Bruhn that he is wanted here without a moment's delay."

"*Is* it four days since I lost her?" asked Hugh, passing his hand wearily across his forehead. "Yes, it must be four days ago; to-day is Friday, and it was on Monday that she went; though, Heaven help me! it has all seemed like one long wretched day since the moment I made the discovery, and I have kept no note of time." He rested his elbows on his knees and hid his face in his hands; and Margaret could see the tears trickling slowly through his fingers.

The breakfast equipage was still on the table, and, although Margaret's heart was quaking with a great dread at the evil tidings which had come thus suddenly upon her, the details of which she had not yet heard, her woman's instinct told her that the man before her stood in need of succour at her hands, were it even succour of the simplest kind. She waited quietly till he had overcome his feelings in some measure, and then she poured out and offered him a cup of tea. He drank it with avidity, for he was half famished; and just as he finished it Mr. Bruhn came into the room.

He saw at once from the faces of both that something more than ordinary had happened. "But where is Beatrice?" he asked, as he shook hands with Hugh.

"My wife is lost," said Hugh, squeezing Mr. Bruhn's hand very hard, while his lips quivered with the emotion which he was ashamed to show, yet could not altogether suppress.

"Lost? Impossible!" said Mr. Bruhn.

"Now that Robert is here, you must tell us all the particulars," said Margaret. And with that she drew a chair close up to Hugh's, and took one of his languid, nerveless hands tenderly in hers. She had assumed a calmness of demeanour which she was far from feeling; but Hugh was so evidently worn out with anxiety and fatigue, that, had she herself given way to his mood, it was plain that he would have broken down entirely.

"It was on Monday that she left home," began Hugh. "I myself went from home on that day. I started for London by the 2.40 train that afternoon. My wife knew that I was going and where I was going; and we parted on the most affectionate terms. It was Tuesday evening when I got back home, and my first inquiry was naturally for Beatrice. The servants stared at me when I asked them where she was, and answered that they thought she had gone with me on the previous afternoon.

"Further inquiry elicited the fact that Beatrice, plainly dressed

and thickly veiled, had left the house five minutes after my departure on the preceding day. In some way which they could not explain, the servants had got the idea into their heads that we were gone out of town together, and had consequently felt no surprise at their mistress's absence. I was utterly dumfoundered, although I made light of the affair before the servants, saying that Mrs. Randolph must have gone to Wellingford, on a visit to her father, and succeeded in half persuading myself that such must really be the case. First of all, however, I hastened up here, thinking that you might have got back a day before your time, and that Trix, finding home dull while I was away, had elected to stay at Brook Lodge till my return. Of course I found no trace of her here, and you were not expected till next day. I then took the first train to Wellingford, feeling certain that I should find her there. But Mr. Davenant had neither seen nor heard anything of her. After arranging that he should send me a telegram in case of anything turning up, I hurried back home, only to find myself as far as ever from the object of my search. After having obtained from my old housekeeper something like a description of my wife's appearance when she last left home, I took Dawkins, the superintendent of police, into my confidence, who at once set about making a series of private inquiries, which resulted in his ascertaining that a lady, closely veiled, and dressed as we knew my wife to have been dressed, took a ticket for London, by the 2.40 train on Monday—by the very train, in fact, by which I myself travelled up to town. But beyond that point all our inquiries failed utterly. None of the London officials who attended the 2.40 train on its arrival could recollect any such passenger as we wanted to trace ; and whether Trix really went through to London, or got out at some station short of that point, was impossible for us to determine. Dawkins and I did not leave London till this morning, and we came back just as wise as we went. Before leaving, we put the case into the hands of the authorities in Scotland Yard ; and in to-morrow's *Times* there will be an appeal to 'Beatrice R., late Beatrice D.,' requesting that she will communicate with her friends, and explain her reasons for leaving home. And now you know as much of the matter as I do myself."

He ended with a weary sigh, and both Mr. Bruhn and Margaret sat in silence for a minute or two, brooding over the strange news they had just heard.

Long and earnest was the consultation of the three that morning. It was finally arranged for the present, at least, the matter should be kept a profound secret from every one except Mrs. Sutton ; and that Mrs. Randolph's absence from home should be accounted for to the servants and others on the score of a visit to her father at Wellingford. It was just possible that the affair, dark and mysterious as it now looked, might work itself out to a happy issue, in which case it would be better that the world should never know

that Mrs. Randolph had ever had occasion to leave her husband's roof.

On quitting Brook Lodge, Dr. Randolph went to make some further arrangements with the friend who had been attending to his patients for the last few days. At present he felt himself utterly unfitted for the requirements of his practice, and everything pertaining to it must still be left in the hands of another. Having arranged this matter to his satisfaction, he went home to try and obtain a few hours of the rest he so much needed, for he had scarcely slept at all since he knew of Trix's disappearance. In the afternoon he again went to Brook Lodge, and in the evening he went up by mail train to London. Nowhere did there seem any rest for him. After a few hours in London, he wanted to be back at Helsingham; and once there, and no tidings of his lost wife yet to hand, he longed to be back in London, where the last trace of her seemed to have vanished amid the innumerable throng of the great city. He had a presentiment that she was hidden from him somewhere amid the mighty London desert, and he paced the streets hour after hour, by daylight and by gaslight, nowhere finding rest for the sole of his foot. But day passed after day till a fortnight had come and gone, but neither in London, nor in Helsingham, nor in Wellingford, was there the slightest clue to the missing Trix.

At the end of a fortnight, Dr. Randolph went back home, and did not leave it again. He resumed his practice, which had begun to suffer greatly through his absence, and tried to forget that he had ever had a wife.

The flight of Beatrice from home was a circumstance as entirely unexpected by Charlotte Herne as by Hugh Randolph. Charlotte's fine instinct had told her that latterly there had been a jarring chord somewhere between the young surgeon and his wife, although Hugh himself had failed to discover as much. In her own mind she put down this touch of discord to Trix's discovery of the secret understanding that existed between Hugh and herself, and to the arrival of certain letters respecting which no word was said to Trix, while Charlotte was made free of their contents from the first. By what means Trix had made these discoveries, Charlotte could not opine, neither did she greatly care. It was sufficient for her purpose that the discoveries had been made, and that Trix was rendered unhappy thereby. Charlotte was scheming how to make her still more unhappy by a more persistent fingering of the one discordant note of her wedded life, when her little spider-like weavings were brought to a sudden finish by Trix's flight, and she had to begin afresh on another and a much more elaborate web. Her belief had been the same as that of the servants,—that Mrs. Randolph had gone to London with her husband, Hugh having changed his mind, and asked her to go at the last moment; for which change of purpose

Charlotte, in her own mind, called him a fool many times over. She was fully acquainted with the business that was taking Hugh to London, but all her miserable little schemes would be destroyed if Trix were taken into her husband's confidence and made as wise as herself. That Trix had been so taken into her husband's confidence she firmly believed, and she was musing bitterly in her own room upon the failure of all her wretched little attempts to breed a fatal difference between the two, when Hugh came back alone from London, and asked for his wife.

When Charlotte thoroughly understood that Trix had left home without her husband's cognizance, and when a day and a night had gone over without bringing any trace of the fugitive, she laughed and wept in the solitude of her own rooms, and clapped her hands, and danced wild elfish dances, for very glee at the thought of what had come to pass. The scheming of years might not have done as much as her hated rival had done for her at one *coup*. And even if she had succeeded in achieving such a result as the separation of husband and wife, was is not more than probable that she would have been obliged to sacrifice herself in the effort? But as matters now were, her position in the house was still impregnable; she possessed the unlimited confidence of her cousin Hugh; and watched no longer by Trix's coldly suspicious eyes—and Charlotte felt that of late they had become very suspicious—she was at liberty to plot and plan, unsuspected by any one, against the return of that warm-hearted but impulsive young person to the home she had chosen to desert.

That Trix would try to come back, that she would make an effort of some kind to regain the position she had so foolishly forfeited by going away, Charlotte did not for one moment doubt. Such being the case, the question was, What direction would Trix's efforts take, and what ought Charlotte to do so as to nullify such efforts as far as possible? Should Trix go to Wellingford or to Brook Lodge, and open negotiations with her husband either through her father or her sister, Charlotte's influence over such negotiations would be very limited indeed—so limited, in fact, as to be hardly perceptible. But should Trix choose to communicate with her husband by letter, the case would be very different. By means of a little management, it was quite possible to prevent any such letters from reaching the person for whom they were intended.

Although Charlotte's eyesight had improved very much of late, it was still far from being strong enough to enable her to read either a book or a letter. In order, therefore, to stop any letters that might be written by Mrs. Randolph before they could reach the hands of Hugh, it became necessary to call in the aid of a second person. The only second person upon whose secrecy she could rely was Tib Not that Tib was particularly discreet or reticent under ordinary circumstances, but Charlotte knew so well how to work upon her superstitious fears as to feel confident that the girl would not

dare to break a promise made as she intended that it should be made.

"I want you to stop till ten o'clock this evening," said Charlotte to Tib one afternoon.

"Yes, Miss Charlotte," answered Tib meekly, and then she pulled a horrible face by way of some slight indemnity to herself for the loss of her evening.

Charlotte was very gracious that afternoon, and Tib was in high favour. They partook of tea together by the cosy little fire in Charlotte's room. After that, Tib read aloud for a couple of hours from Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs,' a work which had a strange fascination for Charlotte. Then Charlotte sat down to her harp, and played and sang one sacred piece after another till Tib's heart seemed to melt within her, and she felt how wicked she must be not to be fonder of going to church on Sundays. About nine o'clock Charlotte left the room for a quarter of an hour.

"Tib, do you love me?" she asked with startling abruptness when she came back.

"Yes, Miss Charlotte, I love you ve-ry, ve-ry much!" whined ready Tib.

"Lying little wretch! I know well that you hate me," exclaimed Charlotte. "I know that you talk about me and my business to dozens of people; that you would leave me to-morrow if you thought it was in the slightest degree to your interest to do so. Your affection for me is worth as much as that, and no more. Therefore, I have decided to-night to make you take an oath never to reveal to a living soul a certain thing that I want you to do for me. Do you hear?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Charlotte; and I'll take the oath with pleasure."

"Will you?" said Charlotte grimly. "Then follow me."

Tib, as in duty bound, followed her mistress up the dark staircase into the still darker loft. With this loft the girl was tolerably familiar, but all her experience of it had been daylight experience, and it seemed a different place after nightfall. The skeleton, too, at the head of the stairs was by no means a stranger to her; she had even shaken hands with him on two or three occasions, and familiarity in her case had not been without its proverbial effect. But Captain Bones by night, and Captain Bones by day, were two very different personages; and a cold shiver crept down Miss Tib's spine as she followed her conductress into the loft.

Charlotte had moved the skeleton and its case a few yards away from the staircase, and, taking the shrinking girl by the wrist, she drew her close up to the grisly sentinel.

"The captain offers you his hand. Take it," she said; and with that she joined the hands of the dead and the living. Tib shivered with fright, but said nothing.

The night outside was very dark, but inside the loft it was thick blackness. Not the faintest outline of any person or object was

visible; only the great square disk of skylight was dimly discernible in the roof.

"Now say as I say, following me word for word," said Charlotte. And with that, she dictated a form of oath which Tib repeated after her in a trembling voice. It was an oath that called down upon her head, in case she should break it, a whole string of frightful ills. "Now say, 'I swear it,'" added Charlotte, by way of orthodox finish.

"I swear it," murmured Tib.

"Now you may go, little crocodile, and remember to keep your oath. Captain Bones wishes you *bon soir*, which in English means a good riddance. Go!"

In one of Charlotte's drawers lay the envelope of a letter which Trix had addressed to her husband before their marriage. At the time he received the letter, Charlotte was sitting near him, and his exclamation of pleasure told her at once by whom it was written. When he opened the letter, he flung the envelope aside in his usual careless fashion, and it fell into Charlotte's lap. What feeling it was that induced her to preserve it, she would have been at a loss to explain; but she did preserve it, putting it away in one of her drawers among sundry odds and ends that were of little use to any one, and it was now brought out to serve a purpose such as she had never dreamt of at the time.

Trix's writing had a character of its own, and Charlotte knew this. It differed in several particulars from the ordinary run of young ladies' caligraphy, and could not readily be mistaken by any one at all acquainted with it for the writing of another person. On the morning after Tib had been bound to secrecy, she was at Charlotte's rooms by half-past eight o'clock. Charlotte took the envelope out of the drawer and bade her examine it carefully.

"Could you recognise that writing again if you were to see another letter addressed by the person who wrote that?" asked Charlotte.

"I am positive that I could, Miss Charlotte," answered the ready Tib; and Charlotte, who knew how quick and observant the girl was in many ways, did not doubt her ability to do so.

The postman's knock was heard at the usual time, and scarcely had he quitted the door before Tib was sent to fetch whatever letters he might have left in the box. There were some four or five in all. "Now take these letters," said Charlotte, "and look carefully over them, and tell me whether any of them are directed in the same hand as the envelope I showed you;" and Charlotte laid the envelope again before Tib, so that there might be no blunder of memory.

There was no such letter, Tib declared, on that first morning. Charlotte took down to the breakfast-room such letters as there were, feeling tolerably satisfied that Tib was too acute to make any mistake in the matter.

Tib waited upon the afternoon post in the same way as she had waited upon the morning's, and day after day the same process was

repeated. Sometimes there were no letters, sometimes there was only one; but whether they were few or many in number, in no single instance was a letter allowed to reach Hugh Randolph till it had passed through the hands of Tib and Charlotte. At length one morning, about a week after Mrs. Randolph's departure from home, Tib's sharp eyes picked out a certain letter, on which she pounced with a little exclamation of triumph.

"This one is in the same writing as the envelope," she said.

Charlotte's hands trembled slightly as she took the letter. "You are sure on the point? You are not making any mistake?" she said.

"Quite sure, Miss Charlotte. The writing of both is as much alike as two peas."

"What postmark does the letter bear?"

Tib scrutinized the letter. "It has *London* stamped on it," she said at last.

"That will do. Give it to me with the others," said Charlotte. She then took the whole of them, and went down to the breakfast-room as usual, but outside the door she smuggled the one special letter into her pocket. The remainder she placed on Hugh's corner of the table, ready for him when he should come in to breakfast. When the meal was over, and Hugh gone again, she took the letter out of her pocket, and stuffed it between the bars of the grate without breaking the seal. She did not care to ascertain the contents; she was satisfied with the knowledge that she had destroyed the first link of communication between the runaway wife and her husband. The second link must be watched for as carefully; perhaps in time the chain might be severed entirely.

Six days later, the second letter was singled out by Tib. This, likewise, was kept back by Charlotte, and afterwards burnt. Again there seemed to be something worth living for. The dull, blank monotony that of late had shut in and compassed her life as with a high wall, whose limits she might never hope to overpass, had been suddenly broken; and trodden-down hopes, faded and buried months ago, like spring flowers at a touch of sunshine, began to feel the warmth of a new life stir within them. Her cousin Hugh was married; that was a fact that could by no means be got over. But his wife had left him; and if Charlotte, by any hidden means, could so far widen the breach as to hinder Trix from ever coming back, would not she, Charlotte, come again, in time, to be as much to him as she had been before that white-faced witch stepped in between them and stole her cousin's heart away? Would not the old, familiar intimacy gradually grow up between them again as though it had never been broken, with herself once more at the head of the household, and no fear of any smooth-spoken intruder ever again coming to steal the power out of her hands? There was a time, and that not very long ago, when all Charlotte's dearest hopes had centred in the expectation of one day becoming Hugh Randolph's wife. But that delicious dream was

over for ever. She could not hope to be anything more to him now than a dear sister might have been, and she had so far schooled her heart as to believe that contentment, and even a quiet sort of happiness, might be found in the enactment of such a character, only—and this was imperative—no third person, no schemer of her own sex, must come between herself and the brother of her choice. From the moment she knew of Hugh's engagement to Beatrice Davenant, the secret thought of Charlotte's heart had been how best to revenge herself on her successful rival. This was a thought that she had never let sleep; that she had nursed continually, turning over one scheme after another in the secret chambers of her brain, but leaving it to time and opportunity to determine which of them she should finally adopt and elaborate to the fulfilment of her dark purpose. But all this was changed now. Her rival had voluntarily abandoned her position; she had made a fatally false move; and before long, Charlotte hoped to have it in her power to cry checkmate and claim the game.

CHAPTER XLI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

It had been dark for more than an hour when the 2.40 train from Helsingham reached the London terminus. The carriages had scarcely come to a stand before Mrs. Randolph was on the platform, and looking for her husband among the crowd. She quickly caught sight of him, but she kept sufficiently in the background to prevent any recognition on his part, although it is questionable whether he would have known her, unless he had met her plump in the face, under her simple disguise of a dark winsey dress and a thick veil. She saw Hugh hail a hansom and jump in, and then she tried to secure a cab in order to follow him. But all the cabs were already engaged, and one or two of the drivers to whom she made a timid proffer of double fare, only shook their heads and said they couldn't do it. The probability of losing Hugh seemed so imminent, that she hurried towards the gate through which the cabs were rolling rapidly one after another, determined to risk everything and stop her husband, rather than be left alone in that great, desolate station, a hundred miles from any one whom she knew. As she was pressing her way through the crowd, she felt some one's hand in her pocket. Instinctively her own hand went down, and grasped the intruder by the wrist. But the thief was not to be so readily taken. With a sudden wrench, and a push that nearly overturned Trix, he broke away from her grasp, and darting under the horse's heads, in a moment was lost to view. It took Trix a minute or two to recover herself, and Hugh's cab had passed out of the gates some time before she reached them.

Trix would not believe that she had missed Hugh till the very last cab had left the station. Even then she lingered. In fact, she knew

not what to do, nor whither to go. After a time, she ventured a little way into the streets, but only to hurry back to the station in a short time, as to a harbour of refuge. She was almost an entire stranger to London. The bustle and noise of the streets confounded her; and one or two coarse remarks, which her good looks elicited from passers-by, frightened her back to the entrance-hall, where lounging porters stared at her, or so she imagined, as if they were quite aware that she had run away from home.

When she found herself on the platform again, it was on the departure side. A large time-table on the wall attracted her attention. Almost mechanically she went up to it, and her eyes wandered through the columns of figures till she found out at what hour the next train left for Helsingham. There would be one in an hour and a half. She would go back home, on that point she was already decided; and if Hugh should discover she had been away, and should question her, she would tell him frankly the object of her journey, and how she had failed. Would it not, indeed, be better to tell her husband that she had been to London, and why she had been there, without waiting to be questioned? Such a step would necessitate a full explanation on his side—an explanation of the secret understanding between himself and Charlotte Herne, and of the meaning of that strange letter which Trix had succeeded in partially deciphering. And should such explanation not be ample and satisfactory, she told herself, for her heart just then was very sore, she would quit his roof at once, and take refuge with her father. She wandered disconsolately to and fro on the platform, meditating these things. The night was cold and gusty, with occasional heavy showers, and the chill atmosphere of the place seemed to freeze her very marrow. Now and then she wandered into the waiting-room, and warmed herself at the fire for a few minutes; but there was a restlessness upon her that would not let her stay long in any one place, and she was soon out again on to the gusty platform, dimly lighted by a few widely-scattered lamps, and looking, so desolate and deserted was it, like a portion of some vast City of the Dead. But by-and-by it began to wake into activity. More lamps were lighted, passengers came straggling in, guards and porters began to bustle about, and the empty hearse-like carriages were suddenly converted into cosy little boudoirs by the simple process of lighting them up. The Scotch express was preparing itself for a long night on the road.

The Helsingham train did not start till a quarter of an hour after the express. To escape the eager, hurrying crowd, Trix sought the comparative seclusion of the waiting-room, and there stood, looking through one of the windows with sad incurious eyes. The five minutes' bell had rung, and nearly all the passengers had shaken themselves into their places, when Trix's wandering gaze fastened on two people, a man and a woman, who came out of the booking-office, crossed the platform, and were shut up together in a first-class compartment of the Scotch express.

The man was Hugh Randolph—her husband. But who was the woman?

The very springs of life seemed to wither up in Trix's soul as she gazed. Her breath came back to her with a great gasp, but her face still kept the unnatural whiteness that had crept over it the moment she caught sight of her husband's well-known figure. From her position at the window, every movement of the only two travellers for whom she had eyes was plainly visible to her, while she herself ran no risk of being seen. She saw her husband hang up his hat, and put on his travelling-cap; she saw him, with every token of affectionate care, draw a warm plaid round the shoulders of his companion, and place his own rug across her knees. Still the woman by his side never lifted the veil which hid the whole of her face, except a very white and rather pointed chin. She was tall and slender; Trix could not help noticing that much as she crossed the platform; and was certainly not old in years; while there was about her a touch of that nameless indefinable grace which is the product of gentle breeding and careful culture.

A moment later the second bell rang, the engine shrieked, and the train began to move slowly out of the station. Trix's last glance at her husband showed him bending forward with a smile on his face, listening to some remark of his companion. Then train and platform and people all became like a dim blurred picture, swimming round before her eyes, and next moment she fell to the ground in a dead faint.

Trix had a confused recollection afterwards of waking up as from a short sleep, and seeing a number of strange faces bent wonderingly over her; of being placed in a cab, and driven she neither knew nor cared whither; but when she thoroughly recovered her senses, she found herself lying on a sofa in a strange room, with a motherly-looking middle-aged woman seated by her side, and gently chafing one of her hands.

"Where am I? and how did I come here?" asked Trix feebly.

"You are in my house, dear," answered the woman kindly. "And here you are welcome to stay till you are quite better. I am a widow, and my name is Mrs. Clemson. By profession, I am an artificial flower-maker, and I have eighteen young people in my employ, every one of them thoroughly respectable. I happened to be at the station this evening, seeing some one off by train, when I neard that a young lady had fainted in the waiting-room. I went to nave a peep, wondering whether it was any one that I knew, for I know a great many people in London. Well, my dear, I didn't know you the least bit in the world, but neither did I like the faces of one or two of the people that were watching you. As you seemed to be entirely without friends, what did I do but pretend that you were my niece, and have you put into a cab, and brought you home with me. You see, I should never have forgiven myself if I had left a pretty

young creature like you to take your chance among a lot of strangers in a great railway station; and it's just as easy for you to communicate with your friends from my house as from anywhere else. The moment I set eyes on you, I saw that yours was something more than an ordinary fainting-fit, or else I should merely have stopped with you in the waiting-room till you were better, and able to take care of yourself. But in your case there's something more than that. You feel very weak and poorly, now don't you?"

"I do, indeed," answered Trix. "Very weary and very ill."

"Just so," replied Mrs. Clemson, with a nod of satisfaction at her own foresight in the matter. "To tell you the truth, my dear, I'm afraid you won't be better either to-morrow or the day after to-morrow; and I have told you all this rigmarole about yourself to save you the trouble of asking questions or bothering your brains as to who I am, and how you got here."

"You are very, very kind," said Trix gratefully.

"Tut, tut, child; don't talk in that way," said Mrs. Clemson. "But before another word is said by either of us, you must just oblige me by swallowing this drop of beaf-tea, which has been warming for you against the time you should come to yourself. Nay, you must really take it. If you don't, I shall think you are getting worse, and shall at once send for the doctor."

The mention of the word "doctor" brought back all Trix's troubles in a flood over her mind. She turned and hid her face in the sofa cushions, and burst into a wild passion of sobs and tears. All Mrs. Clemson's efforts to soothe her were for a long time unavailing, but at length her passion died out of itself from thorough exhaustion of mind and body. Ultimately she was prevailed upon to take a little refreshment, which seemed to revive her in some measure; and as she was now quite calm again, and the hour was growing late, Mrs. Clemson thought the time had come for her to be be taken into Trix's confidence.

"And now, dear, what about communicating with your friends?" she said; "for I suppose you live in London."

"I do not live in London, and I have no friends within a hundred miles of it," said Trix sadly.

"But you are married," said Mrs. Clemson, glancing at the ring on Trix's finger.

"I am married, but I have no husband."

"Not a widow?" said Mrs. Clemson, with an added pathos in her voice.

"No, not a widow," answered Trix. Then she hesitated a moment. Then she took Mrs. Clemson's hand and went on. "You have been so very kind to me in my trouble," she said, "that it is only right that you should know how that trouble has arisen." Then, without mentioning her name, or where she came from, she went on to tell her hostess in what way her suspicions had been aroused; how she

had followed her husband to London, and had lost him in the confusion at the station; how, while looking through the window of the waiting-room, she had seen him come back to the station in the company of some woman whom she did not know, and how the two had gone off together by the Scotch express.

"A story that has been told a thousand times before," said Mrs. Clemson, when Trix had done. "And yet I hardly know how to advise you. One thing is very evident,—that you will have to stay here all night, and you are thoroughly welcome to do so. You can have Eve Warriner's bed. Eve is out of town, and won't be back for two or three days. It will be time enough in the morning to talk over your affairs, and decide what will be the best thing for you to do. And now you had better get off to bed without further delay."

From that bed Beatrice Randolph did not rise for a fortnight. Mrs. Clemson, when she found her young guest getting so rapidly worse, sent at once for a doctor; but all the doctors in the world could not have stopped the illness that was upon her from running its course, and for several days Trix lay on the borders of the shadowy land that divides life from death. During a great part of the time she was light-headed, or else so prostrated by sickness as to be unable to think at all. But in all her mental wanderings she never once alluded to her husband or her wedded life. Nearly always she was back at school in France, anxious about her lessons, or chattering French to her playmates. Once or twice she and Margaret were out walking in the lanes, gathering flowers, and sometimes her father was an actor in her imaginary dramas, but her husband never. Mrs. Clemson, during one of her guest's sane moments, gathered from her the fact that she had both a father and a married sister, and wanted to write on Trix's behalf to one or both of them. But Trix only said, "I shall be better in a day or two, and then I will write to them myself." But the illness proved more tedious than she expected, and not till she had been fifteen days under Mrs. Clemson's roof was she sufficiently recovered to be able to sit up and use her pen.

But before this came about, the Eve Warriner spoken of by Mrs. Clemson on the night of Trix's arrival, had returned home. It was on the fourth day of Trix's illness that Mrs. Clemson took Eve into the sick girl's room, saying as she did so, "Here's another friend come to see you, dear; and one that will not run away again in a hurry. This is Eve Warriner—Mrs. Warriner,—about whom I have spoken to you I don't know how many times. She will take turn and turn about with me in nursing you; and surely between us we shall soon have you well again. Eve is one of the right sort, my dear, and you may trust her as you have trusted me." So saying, Mrs. Clemson left the two younger women together.

Eve Warriner was tall and thin, and very fair, with light flaxen hair and blue eyes. Hers was the face of a woman who had seen much trouble, and could never quite forget it. There were lines of care

about the eyes and of sadness about the mouth, but in the melancholy of her face lay one of its greatest charms. She could put on a soft and seductive manner when she chose that made her seem very winning, and it was in one of her most winning moods that she now came forward, and taking Trix's proffered hand tenderly between her own soft palms she stooped and kissed her on the forehead, and then sat down beside her. In the matter of likes and dislikes Trix had always been greatly led by impulse, and in the present case all her impulses told her that her new friend was one whom she should soon learn to like greatly. Mrs. Warriner was so superior to her surroundings, and had so evidently been bred a gentlewoman, that before they had been a quarter of an hour together, Trix could not help wondering to herself how it happened that such a one as she should have to win her bread by the manufacture of artificial flowers.

"Mrs. Clemson has told me all about your illness," said Mrs. Warriner, "and you must believe me when I say that I am truly sorry to find that she has spoken no more than the truth as regards your condition. Mrs. Clemson is a good nurse; I am but an indifferent one; but you may be quite sure that we will both do our best for you."

And they both did their best, waiting upon and nursing poor Trix with a kindness that never seemed to weary nor grow impatient. Trix would sometimes try to murmur her thanks, or ask what she had done to be treated with such true Christian charity. But that was a subject on which neither of them would hear a word, telling her that they would listen to what she might have to say when she should be quite recovered, but not a day before. Trix's purse had a few sovereigns in it; besides which, she had her watch and a valuable keeper-ring, but not one farthing would Mrs. Clemson accept from her so long as she lay ill in bed.

"There is no knowing, my dear, what use you may find for your money when you get well again," she said. "We must first talk over your plans and prospects, and consider what you intend to do. Afterwards—well—we may, perhaps, think about it. Meanwhile, don't let it bother you,—not the least bit in the world."

It was needful that Trix should give some name to her hostess, and accordingly she called herself "Mrs. Davenant," but said nothing as to the particular town from which she came. She had made up her mind to reveal everything so soon as she should be well enough to talk over her troubles, but just now she shrank, as only an invalid can shrink, from baring her wound to the eyes of any one. That she did not at once communicate by telegraph either with her father or her sister, as she might so easily have done, shows that she was wounded as deeply in her pride as she was in her love. She knew how greatly both Mr. Davenant and Margaret would be pained by her unaccountable absence, yet still she allowed day after day to go by without letting them know where she was. She was so sorely stricken, that for a while she did not care to have even those loved ones by her.

As she then was, it seemed to her better to be among strangers, to whom the details of her wretched story were unknown.

But with returning health came a yearning desire to see her sister, combined perhaps with a wish, unacknowledged to herself, to have some tidings of her husband. So, as soon as she was strong enough to hold a pen, she sat up in bed and scrawled a few lines to Margaret, telling her where she was and asking her to come to her as quickly as possible. By the same post she wrote to her husband as under :—

"When you got back from your journey to London, and found that your wife had left the shelter of your roof, you were doubtless at no loss to comprehend her reasons for so doing. Your clandestine correspondence was no secret to her—had been no secret—for weeks before that time. She followed you to London, and there saw with her own eyes what doubtless she would never have heard from your lips. She cares to know neither who the women was whom she saw you with in the train nor whither you were going. It is sufficient for her to know that you and she can never again be the same to each other that you once were : where confidence is not, affection cannot long have place.

"The writer has been very ill, or she would have communicated with you before now. She omits to send you her address, because she prefers that anything you may have to say should be said through her sister, Mrs. Bruhn, to whom she writes by this post.

"B. R."

Trix had casually learnt that one of Mrs. Clemson's two servants was unable either to read or write, and she picked out this girl to post her letters, being desirous that neither Mrs. Clemson nor Eve Warriner should learn as yet the name of the man by whom, as she conceived, she had been so cruelly wronged. By-and-by she would tell them everything, but at present her heart was very, very sore, and she would keep her secret for a little while longer.

So, when her letters were ready,—Mrs. Clemson being out shopping and Mrs. Warriner busy in the workroom,—Trix sent for the girl, and, by the bribe of a shilling, induced her to take them to the post-office without delay. The girl came back in a quarter of an hour, and told Mrs. Randolph that she had duly posted both the letters. As it happened, the letter addressed to Mrs. Bruhn never reached her. Either the girl had dropped it on her way to the post-office, and had been afraid to acknowledge the fact, or else it had been lost in transit ; in any case, it was never received by Margaret.

Hugh Randolph's letter, as we have already seen, was intercepted by Charlotte Herne, and afterwards destroyed ; but even if it had come to hand, Trix's whereabouts would still have been a mystery, as only in the letter to Mrs. Bruhn was her address given, and that being lost, father, husband, and sister would still have been as far divided from her as before.

(*To be continued.*)

ANOTHER TED.

By Evelyn C. Farrington.

I.

"Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair,
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more."

"IT is the voice of an angel!" exclaimed Ted Seagrave, after listening in rapt silence to the above words, sung in such sweet tones, such passionate feeling, as to justify his exclamation.

Ted was my husband's cousin, and had come to spend a few weeks with us this summer. He proved a gay element in our usually quiet household; very good-natured and open-hearted, if a trifle hasty and thoughtless, and we both agreed that we should miss him very much when the term of his visit expired.

We were seated, Ted and I, upon a comfortable bench, outside the drawing-room window of my husband's old-fashioned country mansion, a place that had been in his family for nearly three hundred years. The said window was open, and through it floated out, in full sweet strains, this well-known air. Ted had not exaggerated the beauty of the voice.

"Who is the singer?" he inquired with deep interest, as once more Tennyson's beautiful words swelled forth upon the summer air, rising and falling with such exquisite feeling that I felt tears suffuse my own eyes.

"It is Olive Orbert," I replied; "a great friend of mine. You, Ted, who are here so seldom, have never met her; she has a voice in a thousand."

Olive was spending the afternoon with me, having, only the day before, returned from a visit to some distant friends.

"I have been suffering from a bad headache, and nothing soothes it like Olive's voice," I added, "so she proposed that I should sit here, and she would sing to me."

Again the words fell upon the air—

"Dear as remembered kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned
On lips that are for others; deep as love—
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
Oh, death in life, the days that are no more!"

The lovely voice trembled a little as it reached the last two lines, and the concluding words were full of a "divine despair."

I knew what an impression Olive's song had made upon Ted, by the earnest ring in his tones, as he remarked :

"Any one who can sing like that must be good and beautiful!"

I smiled. Ted was given to sentimentality, but I had small fears upon his account where Olive was concerned, for I thought I knew him well enough to feel assured she would not be at all the sort of woman likely to add another name to his lengthy list of love affairs.

"I have known many a plain woman with a good voice, and *vice versâ*. Is it absolutely essential that beauty of voice and personal beauty should go together?" I remarked, with some secret amusement.

"Do you mean that Miss Orbert is plain?" said Ted. "But if not beautiful, to sing with such feeling she must possess a noble heart and a beautiful soul."

"Yes," I answered gravely, "there I grant you. Olive Olbert is one of the noblest women I ever met."

"I was sure of it!" he exclaimed. "That's girl's voice——"

"I am not sure that you will think her quite a *girl*, Ted," I interrupted. I was then thirty-seven, he twenty-five—men and women do not always agree upon the question of youth at these different ages.

"She cannot, surely, be so old as I am?" he said.

"Olive Orbert is twenty-seven, and she looks older. But hush! here she comes!"

I wondered, as I introduced them, what impression she would make upon Ted, who had watched her approach with mingled interest and curiosity. I thought that he looked a little disappointed, and, although it would be hard to give a reason, I felt vexed that it should be so. A tall woman was Olive, possessing a slight graceful figure, an erect carriage, inclined, as I sometimes told her, to a little haughtiness.

Her hair was golden, crowning a well-shaped head with innumerable waves; her eyes were large and dark, and this it was which partly redeemed her face from plainness, for they were extremely beautiful; otherwise her features were not perfect, and her complexion was very pale.

"I hope your headache is better, Emily," she said, taking the wicker chair which Ted placed for her, with a quiet "Thank you."

"Very much better. Your music has had its usual effect," I replied.

"We have more than enjoyed your song, Miss Orbert," remarked Ted. "I returned just in time to hear it. It is long since I had the pleasure of listening to a really good voice!"

He spoke so earnestly that she looked at him with a quiet smile, partly of pleasure, but more of amusement. "I am glad you liked it," she replied, simply.

Presently my husband joined us, and we four spent a very pleasant

evening. Ted wore his liveliest air, and Olive smiled that quiet smile of hers oftener than I had seen her for a long while. But Ted's manner towards my friend was totally different from that he assumed in the presence of other girls. His usual witty remarks and quick repartee were addressed to Rupert or myself; when Olive spoke he turned to her with an attentive, almost deferential air, quite foreign to this gay, careless young man. I could not understand the change, unless it was that he did not yet feel sufficiently at ease with Olive to chat with her as he chatted with others.

What a contrast they made, these two! Ted's bright youthful face, his ready smile, and mischievous blue eyes. Olive's sweet expression, sad dark eyes, and dignified air.

"She looks upon him as an amusing boy!" I thought when, a few days later, I watched them strolling across our lawn together. He was talking in his usual animated way, and she was listening, sometimes gravely, sometimes smiling. They had been much together since that first meeting.

"I cannot understand how it is he seems so fond of talking to a quiet woman such as Olive!" I mentally ejaculated. "Nor how, too, *she* takes such evident interest in listening to him?"

'What are you thinking of, Emily?" inquired my husband, who entered the room at this moment. His eyes followed the direction of my own.

"I'm afraid Ted is a sad flirt!" he cried.

"Not in connection with Olive, Rupert. Whatever Ted might do, Olive would never flirt!"

"You don't surely think they are smitten with each other?" cried my husband, opening his eyes very wide.

"No," I replied; "the idea is absurd! Olive is two years his senior. Besides, it is impossible she should ever forget Edward Maitland."

My husband interrupted me with a shrug of his shoulders. "She is just the calm quiet check he requires through life," he said. "Nine times out of ten, men fall in love with a woman exactly opposite to themselves, both in character and appearance."

"They are good friends these two, and I am very glad to see it," I replied; "but as to anything further——"

And I, so well acquainted with the story in Olive's past life, smiled with provoking superiority.

* * * * * *

"Emily," remarked Olive one afternoon, as she raised those sweet grave eyes to my face, "I like Mr. Seagrave; he is so natural and unaffected, and there is so much in him. He reminds me of *my* Ted. And is it not strange that he should be called Ted also?"

II.

Olive and I had been school-fellows. I was the eldest and she the youngest of Miss Rignold's pupils, there being ten years between us. From the first I took a fancy to the little dark-eyed girl, and we had remained the firmest of friends. Now an orphan, Olive resided but a short distance from our house, with her great-aunt, an invalid, to whom she devoted herself with the most unremitting care and attention.

Olive's nature was particularly unselfish and sympathetic. There had been a history, almost a tragedy, in her past and seemingly uneventful life. At nineteen she had been proud, high-spirited, filled with a determination to charm and captivate all who crossed her path. She was a great flirt, and had many admirers; but, after leading them on until they had so far committed themselves as to make her an offer of hand and heart, she scorned them all. One, however, Ted Maitland, had taken her own capricious fancy, although not even to herself, at first, would she confess that she loved him; much less, in answer to his earnest declaration of affection, would she admit the true state of her feelings to the man who would have died to save her a moment's unhappiness. She rejected him as cavalierly as she had rejected others, but only in the hope that he would pursue his suit. He never did so, and, when too late, she awoke, as from a dream, to find that she had made a life's mistake. From that day the girl's proud, overbearing spirit was subdued. With Ted Maitland's departure, the Olive of old passed away also; but those noble qualities, which a mask of pride and ambition had hitherto concealed, were brought to light, and so good had come out of her suffering. But she could not be otherwise than sad when she lived upon a memory fraught with bitterness and remorse. Even after seven years she was sometimes filled with a wild regret for the sound of a voice once so familiar to her ears, for the warm clasp of a hand she had missed so long—a voice and a clasp that she would never hear or feel again as long as life should last.

Often when we were together I would notice the far-away look steal into her dark eyes, the melancholy deepen upon her pale face, and I knew that, in imagination, she was standing beside the grave of one of whom the memory was at times almost more than she could bear. No wonder if her eyes grew dim, and her voice trembled as she sang that song, and to her remembrance recalled the "days that are no more;" days when she loved and was beloved.

"It seems so sad, Olive, that you should dedicate yourself to a memory," I one day ventured to remark. "That you should remain single when it is within your power to brighten——"

"Oh, hush!" she exclaimed, with an expression of absolute pain. "It is not within my power to brighten the life of any one save poor

Aunt Alice. I have no heart to bestow; it was buried years ago in *his* grave. But I am content now, for I feel"—and her gaze wandered in the direction of the star-lit sky—"that we shall meet again."

After this I said no more upon the subject; maybe there was more in those lines of which she was so fond than I imagined—

> "Oh, the heart that has truly loved never forgets,
> But as truly loves on to the close;
> As the sunflower turns to her god when he sets,
> The same look which she turned when he rose."

III.

In spite of the incredulity with which I had received Rupert's remarks, I should have been blind had I not noticed how much brighter and happier Olive had appeared of late. Ted possessed, and did not fail to exercise, the power to divert and amuse her, as no other man had done. It was evident that she had no longer the leisure, or the desire to dwell only upon the sad past. But if, indeed, Olive was unconsciously losing her heart to another Ted, would not an awakening as to the true state of her feelings, be considered as infidelity to the dead, and so prove a rude shock to her? And with no happy result, for it was scarcely likely that a young man of Ted Seagrave's disposition would find in this grave woman of seven-and-twenty a congenial companion for life. Olive's aunt took a great fancy to him, and he was constantly at her house. The invalid seemed never so well, or so cheerful, as during his frequent visits, generally laden with a basket of my roses or a new book to beguile away the tedious hours of illness and pain. I wondered how it would all end.

Lost in a day dream composed of the above materials, I felt two soft hands upon my shoulders, and looking up, met the gentle gaze of Olive's expressive dark eyes.

She looked almost pretty to-night, for a bright colour shone in her cheek, while her smile was sweet and happy.

"How charming you look, Olive!" I exclaimed. "What a pity——" then paused upon second thoughts.

"Flatterer!" said Olive, laughing. "But what is a pity?"

For a moment I was silent. "Where is Ted?" I inquired at length.

"With Mr. Lawrence. We have been rowing upon the lake, and I have brought you the loveliest bunch of water-lilies; you ought to value them, for we nearly capsized the whole concern to get them for you! Look at this lovely bud!"

Olive walked to the window and stood pensively silent for a few moments.

"Do you know," she remarked in a low voice, "this day is the

anniversary of poor Ted's death?" She had turned her back towards me, and I could not see her face, but it was too evident that in thoughts of the dead she had forgotten the living.

I joined her at the window, and slipping my arm through hers, glanced up in her grave face.

"How I wish you could forget the past, Olive!" I remarked, with a sigh. "It is wrong to dwell so much upon it."

"You would have me forget the best man that ever lived!" she replied, drawing away from me, whilst a troubled expression crept into her eyes. "It can never be."

"It can and ought to be," I returned warmly. "You can never be really happy until you have cast into oblivion all that happened seven years ago. I would say, 'Remember him, not as one whom you wilfully wronged, but as one who is far happier now than you could ever have made him?'"

"A lifetime of remorse would not atone!" she murmured, and, in the gathering dusk, I thought I saw a tear steal down her pale face. Poor Ted Seagrave! If, indeed, he loved her, there existed but small hope of his gaining her affection; yet, I still consoled myself with the idea of its being but a passing fancy upon his part.

* * * * * *

Ted's visit, which had lengthened into five weeks' duration, now drew towards a close—only three days more and he would be gone. Olive's aunt had suddenly been taken worse, and I saw nothing of my friend for a week. Ted called every day to inquire for the invalid, and generally received an account of her progress from Olive's own lips. Ted had grown thoughtful of late; I even found him absent-minded and preoccupied upon more than one occasion. He was, however, very far from unhappy; of this I felt certain.

"With Ted's income and Ted's good nature, your friend Olive would be a lucky woman, my dear!" remarked Rupert; "but as to Ted, I cannot see where *his* good fortune would be. A penniless girl with a gloomy face, and a heart buried in the grave of another man!"

Rupert shrugged his shoulders, and I made some indignant rejoinder in Olive's defence. Rupert never shared my enthusiasm for Miss Orbert.

Two days before Ted's departure Olive came to spend an hour with me. Her aunt was better, and gladly spared her, for she needed a little fresh air. It was a beautiful evening; we strolled about the garden, where of course Ted joined us. Olive took off her hat, and swung it gently to and fro. She was paler than usual; to my fancy, her eyes looked larger and darker; she scarcely spoke, and Ted, the voluble, was equally silent.

"You and Emily must come for a row, Miss Orbert," he said at length, turning to her. "Do you see those strange shadows cast by the trees upon the water? How weird and beautiful everything looks by moonlight!"

Wishing to draw Olive out for a row, Master Ted tried a subject which at any other time would most probably have made her eloquent. But to-night she only shook her head, remarking that she must return to her aunt. A dreamy expression crept into her eyes, as they wandered over the smooth surface of the dark waters, and I wondered whether she was thinking of the other Ted in his African grave, upon which the same moon, now beaming down upon her, also shed its silvery rays. I thought, too, how sweet was her expression, how really beautiful she looked to-night.

Perhaps Ted thought likewise, for his glance when he looked at her was full of unmistakable love and admiration.

"Let us go in," I said, somewhat wearily; and we turned back towards the house. I noticed that, when Ted spoke, she dare not trust herself to look at him; she answered, but her eyes refused to return his gaze. How seldom these little matters connected with the heart escape a woman's observation!

I insisted that Olive should borrow one of my shawls, for the air was chilly, and she already suffered from a slight cold. She ran lightly upstairs to fetch it. Ted and I were standing in the hall; his eyes followed her receding figure until it disappeared from view; then he turned and looked at me with a smile, and his voice shook a little as he said:

"*My wife*, Emily, if she will consent to become such."

"Oh, Ted," I exclaimed, with real feeling, "are you very sure it is for your happiness and for hers? Is it possible that you are suited to each other?—that you——"

"Hush," he said, "she is returning! I love her with my whole heart and soul. From the first moment I beheld her, I loved her. Olive Orbert is my 'fate'!"

I said no more. Ted was to be her escort home; she paused upon the door-step and raised her eyes to the stars. 'Twas only for a moment, but in those dark orbs I thought I read a prayer, a wild entreaty, so deep, so earnest, so despairing, it startled me; and I wondered vaguely, as I closed the door upon them, and returned to the drawing-room, whether it was a supplication for strength to remain true and steadfast to conscience.

IV.

Hours passed, and Ted did not return. Determined to wait up no longer, and wondering what could possibly detain him so long, I was just about to leave the drawing-room, when I heard the front door gently open, and he came in. To my surprise, my gentleman walked straight upstairs, never even pausing to say good-night.

"Olive has refused him," I mentally concluded. Ted proved very gloomy next morning; he scarcely ate anything, and talked less,

looking, in fact, a very disconsolate lover. A little later he made known his determination to leave us that day instead of the next, as had been arranged. Rupert would have pressed him to alter this sudden resolve or give some reasonable explanation, but, meeting a significant glance from me, he said no more upon the subject. Presently Rupert left the room, and Ted, walking over to the window, thrust his hands into his pockets, staring out, an object of gloom and despair. "Well, it's all up for me, Cousin Emily!" he remarked, with an effort.

"I feared it would end so," I replied, more sorry for him than I cared to express. "Olive will never marry. Did she tell you about —the other Ted?"

"Yes; she told me everything; but I could not see why she should live a single life because that other fellow died! What she said of him was pretty strong. To judge by her remarks, he must have been a sort of angel!"

"He was no better than his fellows—good-hearted enough, certainly; but so are you, and quite as worthy her love. She was very wayward in those days, and sometimes, I thought, scarcely knew her own mind; but I believe she really loved this man. His death was a terrible shock to her, for undoubtedly she had not treated him well. She led him on until he believed she would accept him. Eventually she meant to do so, but, when he asked her why she refused him, she gave as a reason some foolish and unfounded report which, through a rival, had become circulated against his character. They parted with bitter words; he sailed with his regiment for Africa, and she saw him no more. Some months later he died of a prevalent fever. She now lives upon a memory, to which she has resolved upon remaining 'true until death.'"

"She has determined to make two fellows miserable instead of one!" remarked Ted bitterly. "What could it matter to that poor chap in his foreign grave whether she became my wife or not? I shall never love another woman as I love Olive, Cousin Emily! The first sound of her voice, the first sight of her face, seemed to open a new prospect in my life. I could not even talk to her as I do to other girls; I could not feel that the same little speeches I made to them would do for her! She seems a being higher, nobler than any other I have ever met. I knew from the very first moment I ever saw her that she was the one woman in the world for me!"

"And I fancied that she cared for you a little," I replied. "She has seemed so happy lately."

"Oh, she told me that she liked me very much, and wished always to remain my friend!" remarked Ted, with renewed bitterness. "But begged I would never again mention the possibility of any other relationship between us. It is a very bitter disappointment to me, and it will wreck my life!"

So Ted left us, and we saw no more of our favourite for some time.

Olive's aunt became rapidly worse, and my friend's visits grew few and far between, until the poor old lady died. Miss Orbert had been Olive's nearest surviving relative. Poor Olive! She looked thinner, paler, older. Was it only the nursing, the anxiety, the grief of her aunt's illness and death which wrought this change in her? Or did she regret—but no, that was surely impossible!

V.

THE small but pretty villa in which old Miss Orbert had passed the last few years of her life, together with the limited income upon which she had lived, were bequeathed to her niece Olive, and here my friend intended to remain.

"I shall collect a regiment of cats and dogs, to say nothing of a parrot and canary-bird, upon whom to lavish my attentions!" remarked Olive, with a faint smile, one day when I was spending the afternoon with her. "You must pass an hour or so with the old maid as often as you can, Emily, or she may become melancholy and misanthropic. I am quite alone in the world."

The words, so gently spoken, and the tone so full of quiet resignation, touched me deeply. I approached and took her hand.

"Oh, Olive! would that you could return poor Ted's attachment! Now that you are alone in the world, will you still allow sad thoughts and vain regrets to stand between yourself and a true-hearted, honest affection?" I paused, struck by the expression of anguish which passed over her pale features.

"Emily, you call yourself my friend, and seek to tempt me thus! Have I not prayed that you would never mention the past to me again? For, oh, I am most miserable!"

She fell upon her knees and buried her face in the cushions of the sofa, while I, pained and astonished, sought to soothe the storm of agony which shook her slender frame. What had I done, what had I said, to cause this burst of grief? For which Ted was she now weeping—the living or the dead? I begged her forgiveness, and promised never again to refer to the subject. At length she rose, and, seating herself beside me on the sofa, remarked that she had nothing to forgive, still averted her eye, and, resting her cheek upon the sofa, asked my pardon for giving way so foolishly. "But there are moments, Emily, when, like Mariana, 'I am aweary, weary. I would that I were dead!' Yet I know it is wrong, and I put it from me as much as possible."

She seemed so faint and overcome that I ran up to her dressing-room for a bottle of smelling-salts I knew she always kept there. Something seemed to tell me that Olive loved Edward Seabright, and was deliberately consigning herself to misery from an over-scrupulous conscience.

Upon turning to leave the room, my sleeve caught the corner of a small desk which stood upon a table close by, and, before I could prevent it, the desk fell to the ground. Out rolled most of the articles it contained, and I stooped to pick them up, when—what was this?

Ah, Olive, my friend, your secret was one no longer to me! A small packet fell open in my hand, containing the one little note which, upon some pretext or other, our cousin had written her, in the early days of their acquaintance—the faded bud of a water-lily he had plucked for her when they rowed together upon the smooth waters of the lake. The stem of the flower was tied with a knot of blue ribbon as carefully as any school-girl would preserve her first love-token. So romance was not dead in Olive Orbert's heart—and she knew it!

Replacing the precious packet within the box, I returned to the drawing-room. Olive had now quite regained her composure, but she little guessed that the secret she believed so safe in her own keeping had now passed into mine.

* * * * * *

It so happened, about this time, that Olive received a long letter from an old friend, whom, for some years, she had lost sight of. This lady, now a widow, hinted that, as it seemed they were both almost alone in the world, it would be a pleasant arrangement if they were to join incomes and live together.

"She was a pretty amiable girl fifteen years ago," remarked Olive, when she had shown me the letter, and she seemed pleased with the idea. Mrs. Challinor arrived, and proved all that she had been in girlhood She was exactly the kind of companion Olive required; good-hearted, if a little frivolous, and always cheerful. Yet she had known much sorrow and anxiety, for, young as she was, she had been already twice a widow. She had nursed her first husband through a painful illness; he died; and one short year following her second marriage, Hugh Challinor was thrown from his horse while out hunting, and was killed on the spot.

Olive felt her own melancholy rebuked by this bright example, and, making an effort to rouse herself, regained much of her old cheerfulness.

"I waited five years before I married again," remarked Mrs. Challinor, in speaking of her past life to us.

Something in the expression of Olive's dark eyes seemed to say, "How could you, even after five years, forget your first love?"

"I was happier in my second marriage," continued Mrs. Challinor. "Mr. Challinor suited me better. He had the kindest heart, and was full of life and merriment. Oh, I lost much when I lost him!" said his little widow, as for a moment her bright eyes became moist; the next she smiled again as she went on with her reminiscences.

"My first husband," she continued, "was a remarkably handsome

man, but I think I married him more from pity than any other sentiment, although, afterwards, I learned to care for him as he deserved. We met out in Africa, where I had gone with my brother. Edward fell in love with me at first sight, although before leaving England I believe he had had some unfortunate love affair with a girl who behaved badly to him. He died of fever, and in nursing him I narrowly escaped death myself. When my brother returned to England I accompanied him, leaving poor Edward in his foreign grave."

Olive's dark eyes are bent with a sort of wondering interest upon the almost childish face of the young widow. Rose Challinor, with all her flitting smiles and tears, could not lay claim to the wealth of deep, true, noble feeling possessed, all unconsciously, by my friend. But perhaps it is as well that women are not all alike.

"How strange it is," remarked Olive, "that until you told me yesterday, I had no idea you were ever married before!"

"Not so very strange," returned Mrs. Challinor, "for I don't often talk of the past; and during the whole of my stay in Africa, and until I was Mrs. Challinor, we did not correspond."

"You have never told us your first husband's name, Rose!" said Olive presently.

"Edward Maitland; or, as his brother officers used to call him, Ted Maitland," she replied.

VI.

Ted Maitland! the words rang in my ears. I can almost hear the widow's unconscious tones, now, as I write. And Olive sat, with her eyes fixed upon Rose Carey's face, her lips parted, her face pale as death. Mrs. Challinor stooped, and taking up the poker, smoothed a refractory lump of coal into submission. Then she turned to me.

"He was the youngest son of old Sir Richard Maitland," she continued, innocent of the emotion her simple words had aroused. Her last remark confirmed my more than suspicion.

"We knew something of the family before Captain Maitland left England," I remarked.

"Indeed? but it is likely; they had many friends, and were influential people. Did you know the girl who jilted Edward? I should much like to see her. Idle curiosity, perhaps, but pardonable under the circumstances. Sir Richard was a stern father."

So rattled on the woman who had supplanted, if indeed she ever did so, Olive Orbert in Ted Maitland's heart; and amidst her unceasing prattle, Olive made her escape unobserved. Strange that they should thus come into contact, the girl he had loved and parted with in anger, and the girl he had married hoping she would heal the wound in his heart.

When next alone with my friend. I found she was not quite the same. There was a flash in her eye suggestive of bitterness and defiance; but it vanished when I spoke to her, and leaning her head upon my shoulder, she said she was glad he had been happy; yet there was something like humiliation in her look and voice.

A shock undoubtedly it was to her, but not so painful as it might have been, had she loved him as she did before meeting Edward Seagrave. As it was, she had learned to love the latter with all the strength of her noble heart, even against her will. For nine years, as it proved, she had been living up to a delusion, had been constant to the memory of one who had gone out to Africa only to forget her, and to find consolation in another's love. Another woman had received his caresses, had borne his name, had made his brief life happy, had soothed his dying moments. Yes, it was humiliating, but it also brought its consolation. Poor Edward Maitland had not died of a broken heart; Olive had not been the ruin of his life. Was she not now free to accept the love of another?

A change in Olive was perceptible from that day. The old smile returned to her lip, the light to her beautiful eyes. Hope, which had been dead in her, now revived. I felt that the future might be left to itself.

* * * * * *

A year passed on. Olive and I were alone in my pretty drawing-room. She was spending the evening with me, for Rupert had gone up to town on business, and I never cared to be quite alone at night, although expecting his return every moment. It was a cold evening in November, but the fire, piled high, sent forth a glow of comfortable heat.

I thought, as I viewed Olive, in her gown of some rich crimson material, with her mass of dark hair and large liquid eyes, how handsome my friend had grown of late. Olive was again living alone. Mrs. Challinor had taken captive a Scotch baronet, who spent all his time in the Highlands, excepting three months of the season in town, when their house was the gayest of the gay, and pretty Lady Mackenzie's box at the Opera was always crowded with the cream of society between the acts.

My husband's step in the hall disturbed my reverie, and Olive looked up with a smile as I hastened to meet him with as much pleasure as I used to meet him in the first days of our marriage.

Upon reaching the hall I found to my surprise that Rupert had a companion.

"Cousin Emily, how are you?" A hearty kiss accompanied the words. It was Ted—our dear Ted himself! But the boyish look had left his face; he was altered; graver and more earnest was his fair face, but kindly and pleasant as ever.

A few minutes later I re-entered the drawing-room. Olive had risen, and was standing, her hand resting, as if for support, upon the

mantel-shelf, her face turned towards the door in an attitude of listening.

"Olive," I said quietly, "Rupert met his cousin in town, and Edward has returned here with him."

I could get no further, for I was quietly put aside by Ted himself, who entered without ceremony. Well-pleased was I to leave them alone together, closing the door behind me, but not before I overheard his delighted exclamation:

"Olive, my darling, have I returned in vain?"

Wise Rupert! I sometimes think, had it not been for you, Olive would never have become Ted's wife; for my husband, meeting Ted, who inquired for Olive, had told him all.

* * * * * *

Some years have elapsed since Olive became Mrs. Seagrave, and Ted has amply proved the sincerity of his love. The echo of small voices and young feet make glad their home. Happiness and prosperity follow them in greater measure than is often bestowed upon mortals. Let us trust they will do so as time rolls on, and opens for these two the portals of a still brighter life beyond.

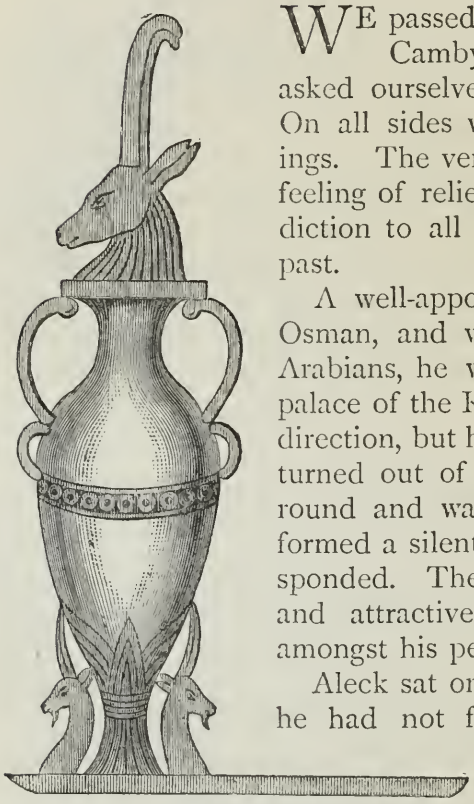
AT SET OF SUN.

If we sit down at set of sun,
And count the things that we have done,
And counting find
One self-denying act, one word
That eased the heart of him who heard;
One glance most kind,
That fell like sunshine where it went,
Then we may count that day well spent.

But if, through all the live-long day,
We've eased no heart by yea or nay;
If through it all
We've done no thing that we can trace,
That brought the sunshine to a face;
No act most small,
That helped some soul, and nothing cost,
Then count that day as worse than lost.

IN THE LOTUS-LAND.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Letters from Majorca," "The Bretons at Home," etc., etc.



Ancient Egyptian Vase.

WE passed rapidly through the ancient City of Cambyses, this City of the Pyramids, and asked ourselves where its antiquity had gone to. On all sides were modern and fashionable buildings. The very railway station we had left with a feeling of relief, was but of yesterday; a contradiction to all the traditions of the Cairo of the past.

A well-appointed equipage was in waiting for Osman, and with all the speed of thoroughbred Arabians, he was soon whirling away towards the palace of the Khedive. Our roads lay in the same direction, but he soon outstripped us, and presently turned out of sight. Before doing so he looked round and waved his hand; we fancied his lips formed a silent "*Au revoir*," and we as silently responded. There was something strangely winning and attractive about him: an exceptional trait amongst his people.

Aleck sat on the box beside the driver. So far he had not failed in his engagement, and we should certainly have been appropriated ten times over at the station without him. Our rooms had been engaged at the *Hôtel d'Angleterre*, but this did not please our dragoman, who insisted upon first inspecting the *Continental*.

"You will not like the other, sir," he declared, with that downright manner of his from which there was no appeal. And we soon found that it saved time and trouble to let Aleck take his own way in small things. Arguments were lost upon him, and on all occasions he took refuge in the same excuse: "He had not understood;" meaning that his English was at fault. It certainly was often unintelligible, though fluent. He spoke so rapidly that half of it sounded like his native Arabic: perhaps was so.

On this occasion it was useless to tell him to drive straight to the Angleterre; we might as well have tried to stay the wind or turn the tide. Accordingly we steered for the Continental: a large and fashionable building, than which London and Paris could show

nothing more imposing. Of course we had our trouble for our pains. The polite manager regretted that every room was occupied. H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge was staying there, and had the hotel been twice its present size there would have been no room to spare. In three days they would be too happy to accommodate us. Meanwhile, the Angleterre, belonging to the same proprietor, would be found very comfortable.

During the interview Aleck had stood within the doorway of the large hall, small riding-whip in hand, without which he was never seen, and which he freely used to belabour the backs of what he considered the "common people," whenever they would not do his bidding or did not get out of his way quickly enough to please him. Many a time, as the days went on, we expected a general fight and commotion to set in as Aleck in vigorous wrath applied his whip right and left, and nothing surprised us more than the calm spirit in which his chastisements were received. It was as though the bonds of slavery were upon them, and they accepted all as their due. Aleck also probably knew whom he had to deal with, and had long since measured his own power against their resistance, for he was too shrewd and cunning to risk his own safety and our own peace and quietness. He never once fell into trouble or caused any disturbance. By his indomitable will he often gained us admittance where others failed. At the entrance to mosques closed for the time being to strangers and "heretics," he calmly put aside the guardians, deaf to remonstrance; and himself removing our boots, and placing on slippers or sandals for treading the sacred pavement, would quietly open the door, raise the thick carpet or *portière* at the entrance, and lead the way as if he had been monarch of the place to whom laws and regulations were a dead letter.

He had stood within the doorway whilst we spoke to the manager, anxiety upon his countenance: with all his faults, we believe it was anxiety for our welfare. Besides which, the other hotel was not sufficiently dignified for any one he deigned to serve. "*Noblesse oblige*" applies to all ranks and many occasions.

We have often wondered since whether, if Aleck had conducted the interview instead of ourselves, he would have managed the ruler of the hotel as he did the guardians of the mosques. Alexandre Dumas has not been the only one to prove that possession is nine points of the law. Certain it is that when the manager politely escorted us to the waiting carriage, Aleck followed with a look of ill-concealed anger upon his face, which seemed about to break out in remonstrance. On this occasion the whip was not applied; but discretion, not want of will, kept it quiet. He mounted the box and we went our way.

At last Aleck could contain his feelings no longer. Turning to us with a mortified look in his dark eyes, he exclaimed:

"You will not like the Hôtel d'Angleterre, sir. It is not good

enough for you. I would have stayed at the Continental even if they had had to put me another room on to the roof."

We were amused, and felt we had a character to deal with. It was evident that we should do well to leave all battles to our dragoman.

The hotels in the new part of the town are rather near together, the Continental perhaps being the most remote of all. On our way, in the distance the citadel uprose like a vision, and beyond it the dome and slender minarets of the Mosque of Mohammed Ali, the latter a splendid landmark for all the country round. Looking back from the outskirts of the desert, still it is visible, calling the faithful to prayer as it were, resembling a building of cloudland more than of earth.

We soon reached the hotel. The exterior was not inviting after the magnificent Continental, but the situation was more open. It stood opposite the public or Esbekeeyeh Gardens, whilst the Continental was surrounded by houses. Here at least we had green trees to look at, and the open sky above us; whilst so many times a week an Arabian or Egyptian band played its singular music; strains heartrending and inharmonious, like the wailing of lost souls; reminding one a little of the unrest and misery running through Chopin's Funeral March. But the wailing and discord of the Egyptian music was a hundred times greater. It never ceased.

As we passed through the streets the donkey-boys were in full evidence, but for the moment they spared us. The further we went, the greater grew our surprise and disappointment. Cairo seemed as modern and uninteresting as Alexandria. Our immediate surroundings were as commonplace as those of London or Paris; nowhere did we feel the Oriental influence; nowhere was it visible, excepting when we raised our eyes and beheld afar off the wonderful vision of the Mosque of Mohammed Ali. "Have patience, sir," said Aleck, on hearing our regret; "this is not Cairo, but a modern quarter built for tourists. The real Cairo lies yonder. Before you have been here a week you will say there is no place like it."

Heavy arcades ran in front of our hotel, such as would never be built in any modern street of Cairo. But they protect the pavement from the glare of the sun, and people sat in front of their doors or of the *cafés* within the shade. For though it was winter the sun was hot and brilliant. It was difficult to conceive that a few days' journey would land us in regions of snow and ice, of east winds and everything that is cruel and uncomfortable in the way of climate.

Within and around the large doorway of the hotel, there was the usual assemblage of dragomans and orientals. To the former, the presence of Aleck on the box must have been unwelcome. To our dragoman, however, this would make no difference; he was above such small considerations as other people's feelings. Perhaps in this lay much of the power he possessed over them; for we never saw any

HOWLING DERVISHES.

one else of his class half so daring, or tyrannical, or successful in gaining his ends. We grew at last to believe that he was a terror to all guardians and administrators of rules and regulations; and that, in a higher degree, it was of such stuff as he was made that the rulers of great bodies of people, the founders of a new order of things, the conquerors of the world, the removers of old landmarks, are also fashioned.

With every mark of vexation on the part of Aleck, but with gratitude on our own for any *pied à terre* in Cairo, we found ourselves not at all uncomfortably settled. Many less fortunate people were turned away, to continue their weary search for rooms. The luxury and gorgeousness of modern hotels, great halls and baronial staircases, all this was rather conspicuous by its absence. It was an old building, and old-fashioned, with long rambling passages, and small bridges over vacuums that threatened to give way as you passed over them, and plunge you into unknown depths. The walk to the bath-room was in itself always more or less a voyage of uncertainty. It took five minutes to reach it, and most of the journey was *al fresco*, conducting you through narrow balconies, round a dozen turnings, over roofs and round chimney-pots; the whole joined by these frail bridges that seemed like Mohammed's coffin, suspended between heaven and earth. As costumes at that early hour are not very substantial, one generally reached the bath-room with chattering teeth and cold shiverings.

It was evidently an hotel that from time to time had taken in and appropriated surrounding houses, connecting all by these small bridges with a supreme disregard to life, but making of the whole a delightfully rambling, mysterious and unconventional institution, where a regiment of soldiers might have scattered and concealed itself, and one might play a game of "Hide and Seek," and, like the unfortunate lady in the "Mistletoe Bough," hide for ever.

This reminds us—*par parenthèse*—that not very long ago, we saw this self-same romantic and unfortunate chest in a room at Abbotsford, one of the relics with which the once Great Unknown had surrounded himself. Immediately there came back to us a rush of bitter-sweet memories; days of early years, when on many a winter's evening we listened to this melancholy rhyme in the gloaming, the flickering fire throwing lights and shadows upon the room; the singular pathos of a low-toned, earnest, sweet and beloved voice—to whom the sad and romantic strains appealed no less forcibly than they did to Sir Walter himself—never failing to call up the tears of emotion that lie so close to the eyes of childhood. We were no longer at Abbotsford, but in the foreign land of our birth and youth, and there rose up before us a face whose ethereal and spiritual beauty we have never, never seen equalled. For a blissful moment we lost all consciousness of surrounding objects in a vision of the past. A dream to be rudely broken as a voice suddenly penetrated our ears and brought us back to earth:

Dancing Dervishes

"That, gentlemen, is the portrait of Sir Walter's daughter who lived and died unwedded."

And we looked up to gaze upon a young lady anything but sylph-like in form, and very different from the romantic and graceful creations of the great novelist.

To return to Cairo and the Hôtel d'Angleterre, where certainly there was much noise, and the sound of many voices—and probably no very strong emotions.

Large and rambling though the hotel was, every inch of space was utilized. The servants had no rest night or day; it is not easy to get the Egyptian temperament to work beyond a very methodical pace, which will only accomplish a certain amount in a given time. The dining-room was for ever crowded with a curious mixture of people. Loud tones were the order of the day, a Babel of tongues. Three nations were chiefly represented; English, American, and German; in the proportion of some thirty Americans to one Englishman, with an occasional German thrown in. Many of them looked curious and old-fashioned enough to have assisted at the building of the famous tower. Two ancient ladies were our admiration and amusement. That they were in Egypt and alone, proved them daring and adventurous. Ancient and withered, there was something strangely pathetic about them: an element often accompanying old age. They were evidently eccentric. One of them cultivated a beard; the other wore her hair after the fashion of Madge Wildfire on a refined scale. Both invariably sat down in bonnets; large bonnets that seemed a compromise between the old-fashioned "cottage" of the days of our grandmothers, and the present Salvation Army adornment. They probably thought that to appear always with the head covered was a sign of modesty; and they were evidently modest ladies, shrinking into their shells in a manner that aroused sympathy and made one long to assist them through their pilgrimage.

"Egyptian antiquities," laughed H. on the first occasion of our meeting them. "They look like twin Sphinxes brought back to life and shrunk down to human proportions. Who can they be?"

Luckily they had placed us at a quiet table, near pleasant people: *habitués* of the hotel who had spent many months there, and proved agreeable. The *table d'hôte* also was very good; and so, at the end of three days, when the Continental graciously intimated that excellent rooms would be at our disposal, we had settled down on so comfortable and friendly a footing with our present quarters and neighbours, that we decided not to move.

But before we left Cairo, a relaxed spirit had somehow crept into the hotel; the commissariat department fell away, the dinners were abominable, and had our stay not been drawing to an end, we should certainly have fled to fresh pastures. Fault-finding became general. Even the two old ladies once mildly protested that not being of the animal world they could not swallow bones; nor

TENT OF A DERVISH SHEYKH.

cannibals, they were unable to eat meat that had simply passed through the kitchens. But in spite of a general fault-finding things did not improve: and we never learned the reason of the change.

That we remained at the Hôtel d'Angleterre did not please our dragoman; but he was a man wise in his generation, and like every one else had learned to submit to the inevitable. He even admitted at last that the hotel had its merits, but never ceased to declare that we should have been infinitely happier at the Continental, or the New, or Shepheard's. Since that day the latter has been rebuilt, "with every modern improvement," as the advertisements announce.

Our first visit in Cairo was one of our most curious experiences. It was the very day, almost the very hour, of our arrival. The Howling Dervishes were giving their religious performances, and as they only went through them at certain times, another opportunity might not occur for us. So, once settled at the hotel, we set out for the ceremonies of this peculiar people. Aleck on the box was in his glory, and felt himself a person of consideration and importance. His profession was not only his daily bread, it was his delight. With an emperor under his charge, he would have considered himself for the time being of royal blood. He shone by reflected glory, and this added to his daring and audacity, and his success.

It was more like a summer than a winter's day—according to our English ideas of winter. The sun poured down upon a hot white road, from which the dust and the sand blew unpleasantly. "In England, sir," said Aleck from his box, "when you see the dust blow you say it is for rain, but you must not say so in Egypt. Here you will only want umbrellas for the sun." Our dragoman was right; the dust did not mean rain, though it often meant a great deal of discomfort.

The place where the Howling Dervishes performed was at their chief college on the banks of the Nile, outside the town, on the road to old Cairo. Carriages lined the thoroughfare; donkeys and donkey-boys were in evidence. Half Cairo seemed on its way to the dervishes, for those visitors who had not heard them howl desired to do so. It is one of the special sights of Egypt, though not the most agreeable.

We had no difficulty in recognizing the college. It was late, and an immense number of carriages and donkeys were standing outside. The scene looked a perfect fair, and every fresh arrival caused commotion in trying to make its way to the front.

"Behind time, sir," said Aleck laconically. "The place will be crowded."

"Too crowded to get in, perhaps," we returned; the prospect of a crush in a close Eastern room not very inviting.

"Leave that to Aleck, sir," said our self-confident dragoman. "I will find you not only room but seats also."

We entered a long narrow passage which looked hastily run up for

the occasion, and led to the *sanctum sanctorum:* a small room in comparison with the crowd to be accommodated. The building, plain and square, was lighted by a dome. There was nothing to appeal to the imagination; no subdued light; no stained glass to throw rich colours over walls and ceiling and reflect the sunshine in a thousand rainbow hues. Everything was pale and garish; and the bare, yellow-washed walls were only here and there decorated with a few weapons and symbols necessary to the faith of the dervishes.

The room was crowded with English and Americans. The earlier comers had found seats, the later must be content to stand. Nevertheless Aleck, by some magic, true to his word, brought us chairs. A large portion of the middle of the room was railed off in a semicircle. In the centre of the railing was the Kibleh or Mecca Niche, which in the mosques holds the Koran and no doubt did so here. Immediately opposite the Kibleh, in the outer wall, protected by the ends of the railing, was a narrow doorway, towards which all eyes were directed in expectation.

We had not been seated many moments when it opened and the sheykh appeared, followed by about twelve dervishes. The former, aged and venerable-looking, seemed duly conscious of the gravity of his office. He wore a dark gown or tunic, and upon his head a black fez or cap, beneath which his hair fell in long grey locks. Seating himself opposite the Mecca Niche, he folded his hands and closed his eyes for a moment. The others filed in one by one like a string of turkeys and sat round him in a semicircle. All were dressed in black scanty gowns, and most of them were bare-headed; the long dark hair, wild and straggling, falling over the shoulders; whilst the dark skin was only redeemed by yet darker eyes. For the moment their expression was subdued, almost stupid, like that of men under the influence of a drug; but they were no doubt only cultivating that state of mind and imagination necessary to the ecstatic mood. They evidently possessed great veneration for their sheykh—an office as hereditary as the throne and accompanied by far more personal influence and superstition within its regions—and waited for him to open the ceremony.

You might have thought the sheykh was invoking inspiration, only that the form of their devotion does not vary. He began with a short prayer, during which the dervishes around him were motionless and inscrutable as a sphinx. But the Egyptian images of old were far more interesting than these dervishes, who became repulsive as they warmed to their performance.

The sheykh concluded his short prayer, and the dervishes immediately repeated the name of Allah in a loud voice, the walls of the room ringing back the echo. This was followed by a profession of part of their faith, spoken in loud, rapid tones. Then all rose to their feet. The same prayers were repeated over and over again, growing louder and more excited; heads and bodies began to nod

and sway to and fro, the long hair streaming in disorder. Some of the faces grew rather terrible. The voices increased, and the howlings were anything but human. The men looked insane, with something almost suggestive of wild animals about them; the whole performance repelled. Their ecstasy, if such it was, seemed a species of fine frenzy, and if they had suddenly produced daggers and stabbed each other, it would have been a proper conclusion to the scene. Remembering that all these ceremonies are done under the influence of religious fervour—a part of their worship—one marvels that human beings exist who believe such an exhibition can be pleasing to a divine Ruler of destinies. As their howlings grew louder, their gestures more frenzied, one expected to see heads drop off, or at least dislocation of the neck; but nothing happened.

The performance was made more ghastly by unearthly music which accompanied the movements, and kept time to voice and gesture. To the left of the sheykh, who alone was accommodated with a mat or praying carpet, stood the musicians; a flute, a horn, tambourines, and small drums, making up the wild orchestra. The drums were made of metal and struck with leather. Evidently the music had great influence upon the dervishes and stimulated their efforts; acting upon them as the sound of the bugle to the war-horse, the bagpipes to the wild highlanders in the mountain passes of Scotland, the *biniou* to the Breton.

It was a curious sight; not least strange, the absorbed expression of the spectators who sat or stood round the railing. The contrast of type was also very evident; the pale European faces and fair hair, looking, in spite of wonderful costumes, of every sample of plain feature, almost beautiful and refined in comparison with the clumsy faces, swarthy complexions, long lustreless hair of the dervishes. But even here race meant much; there were degrees of ugliness. The sheykh himself, for instance, was handsome and dignified; his features were regular and finely cut; no European in the room was of a better type, few half so good. He seemed to have come of a long line of ancestors; it was only too evident that many of the Europeans had had no ancestors at all. Not his the part to join in the insane motions of his followers, but to preserve a solemn majesty becoming his hereditary office. The performance is called a *Zikr*, meaning a continued calling upon the name of Allah attended by gestures, dancing, nodding the head, howling, or all combined.

To-day the Zikr was prolonged. The performance must have been fearfully fatiguing, and every one expected to see them fall, giddy and unconscious. But howlings and noddings ceased, and the dervishes sat down again in the most ordinary and every-day manner possible. Of the spectators they took no notice; these seemed neither to add to nor diminish their zeal. There was no

WORSHIPPERS IN A MOSQUE.

self-consciousness about the performers. When all was again still and quiet the sheykh offered up another prayer, the dervishes cried "Hoo," kissed his hand, filed through the small doorway by which they had entered, and we saw them no more.

Apart from religious fanaticism, these dervishes are a curious and interesting people. They have many monasteries, some of which are well worth visiting. The traveller is frequently welcomed by the sheykh with great kindness and hospitality.

A remarkable institution is the retreat of the Bektashee dervishes, near the tombs of the Mamelukes. It had fallen from age into semi-ruin, but was rebuilt by the late Khedive; for the dervishes in their way are venerated. Before the Tekkeeyeh flourishes a stretch of green trees and shrubs, looking rather like an oasis in a sandy desert. Passing beyond this up a long flight of steps, you enter a small, carefully-kept garden, at the end of which lies the monastic building. It is on an extensive scale, with a large hall for devotions, many cells for the dervishes, rooms set apart for the sheykh, and an elaborate kitchen. Beyond it is an ancient, partly underground quarry, penetrating far into the rock, at the extreme end of which lies buried the Sheykh Abdallah, a native of Adalia. He was the first of the dervishes to visit Egypt, where he founded the order, which has ever since flourished. Here, in the cave—he was called Abdallah of the Cave or Grotto—he lived, died, and was buried, full of days and honour.

There are many dervish monasteries, and many orders of dervishes. Few amongst them are Egyptians; and it is difficult to conceive the grave, and in many ways elevated, character of the ancient inhabitants of the Nile country having any sympathy with these excited ceremonies. Yet it is certain that the mysticism of the dervishes strongly appealed to the Egyptian temperament.

The dervishes are chiefly Turkish and Asiatic; the monks and freemasons of the East.

Apart from their wild forms of worship, there is often much good in them. Not being cloistered they go out and take their part in the world, follow various trades, belong to all sorts and conditions of men. Most of them are of the humbler classes—tradesmen and artisans. Many are the ordinary fellaheen, working on the banks of the Nile. These work-a-day dervishes seldom take part in their religious services and ceremonies. The performing dervishes are set apart for these purposes, and might almost be called priests of their order rather than laymen, only that they are not qualified for the office by any special training, or study, or "laying on of hands."

Those who give up their lives to ceremonies, performing at funerals, festivals, weddings and the like, are called Fakeers. By this means they earn their livelihood, and when the daily bread runs short, as it often does, they are not ashamed to beg. It is not a very wholesome way of earning a livelihood, and encourages idleness. The people

are inclined to give to this semi-religious sect when they see them in want; and these, knowing they have only to ask and to have, too often give way to their natural indolence, and degenerate into a begging community against which there is no law. Their dress is peculiar and distinguishes them at once. Like Joseph's coat, it is a patch-work of many colours. They usually carry a staff or crook, also decorated with strips of coloured cloth, so that they sometimes resemble a clown in a pantomime. In no sense are they a race apart, and they are allowed to marry.

The different orders of dervishes have different dresses. One order is distinguished by its black, dark blue, or dark green turbans: a sect is again split up into divisions, of which the most fanatical are known by their dark green turbans and banners. At their festivals they perform all sorts of juggling feats: charm snakes, thrust nails into their eyes and bodies, eat hot burning coals, and do many other apparent impossibilities in their ecstasies.

These moods carry them to great lengths. When they have whirled or howled themselves into a mad delirium, they will thrust daggers into their cheeks or through their lips, and keep them there whilst the blood flows down upon their whirling garments. At such times their eyes, "in a fine frenzy rolling," often glow like coals of fire, their features are distorted, they look, and for the moment are, raging lunatics. Sane men, calm-judging, they are not; rather men possessed of a demon. It all reads more like a dream or a hideous nightmare than a description of human beings gifted with sense and intelligence.

Yet many are constant in their devotions, showing an earnestness of purpose that, sensibly directed, might lead to great results.

Like the ordinary Mohammedans they are not restricted to times and places for their rites and ceremonies. At night, when gathered round a walee, you may frequently hear them giving voice to their singular emotions. The Walees were saints and sheykhs of old, many of whom are now invoked in prayer: the name is also given to the tombs in which the bodies of the saints repose.

Nothing sounds more unearthly than these screams and howlings proceeding in the dead of night from these fanatical dervishes, gathered in solemn conclave round the walee, overshadowed perhaps by a palm-tree, whilst the dark night sky seems to look down upon them with a serenity which might well rebuke their proceedings, and the stars pass on their course in startled amazement.

Sometimes these midnight worshippers are in utter darkness, and you can only faintly make out their curious outlines; one will wear a turban, and another a conical-shaped ornament very much like an inverted flower-pot, and a third a broad-brimmed hat not unlike an American wide-awake. At other times they will carry lanterns: strange white constructions like those used at Chinese festivals, but much larger; or sometimes round and inflated, like an old-fashioned

crinoline. These lanterns throw weird lights and shadows upon the faces, upturned in all the rapt ecstasy of devotion, or the stolid gaze of imitation. They whirl and dance, repeat long recitations, the Zikr never comes to an end, they call over and over again upon the name of Allah, until physical exhaustion too often closes the performance and sends them to their beds to fall into a troubled sleep.

Many a time, in Cairo, we saw, at nightfall, a curious procession of men passing through the streets, most of whom wore the conical hat, with the dark cloak or abba thrown over the shoulders. In their hands some carried the long, white, lighted lantern.

At first we were puzzled as to where they were going and what they could be. Their bearing was grave and sedate. They walked as men having a serious mission, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left. We soon discovered that they were dervishes.

One night we followed them at a distance. As no one else did so, they evidently awakened no curiosity in the people of Cairo; whatever their business it was nothing unusual. Passing out of the better parts of the town, leaving the Esbekeeyeh Gardens behind us, we soon found ourselves in the Greek quarter.

The streets were narrow and squalid; Greek names were over the shops, many of which seemed cigar divans, where a few people could enter and drink and smoke—they were too small to admit more than two or three at a time. Small side courts and passages led into narrow defiles full of darkness and squalid misery. Into these we dare not venture beyond the threshold, though we might have come upon many a real and strange scene of Eastern life, full of the softening picturesqueness of night with its lights and shadows, its gleams and glooms; many a trace of suffering humanity; that sad but interesting portion whose difficult task is to earn its daily bread—forming so much of the mystery of life, and telling us so powerfully that progress is not always upwards. If left for a time to themselves, what would become of these people in the end?

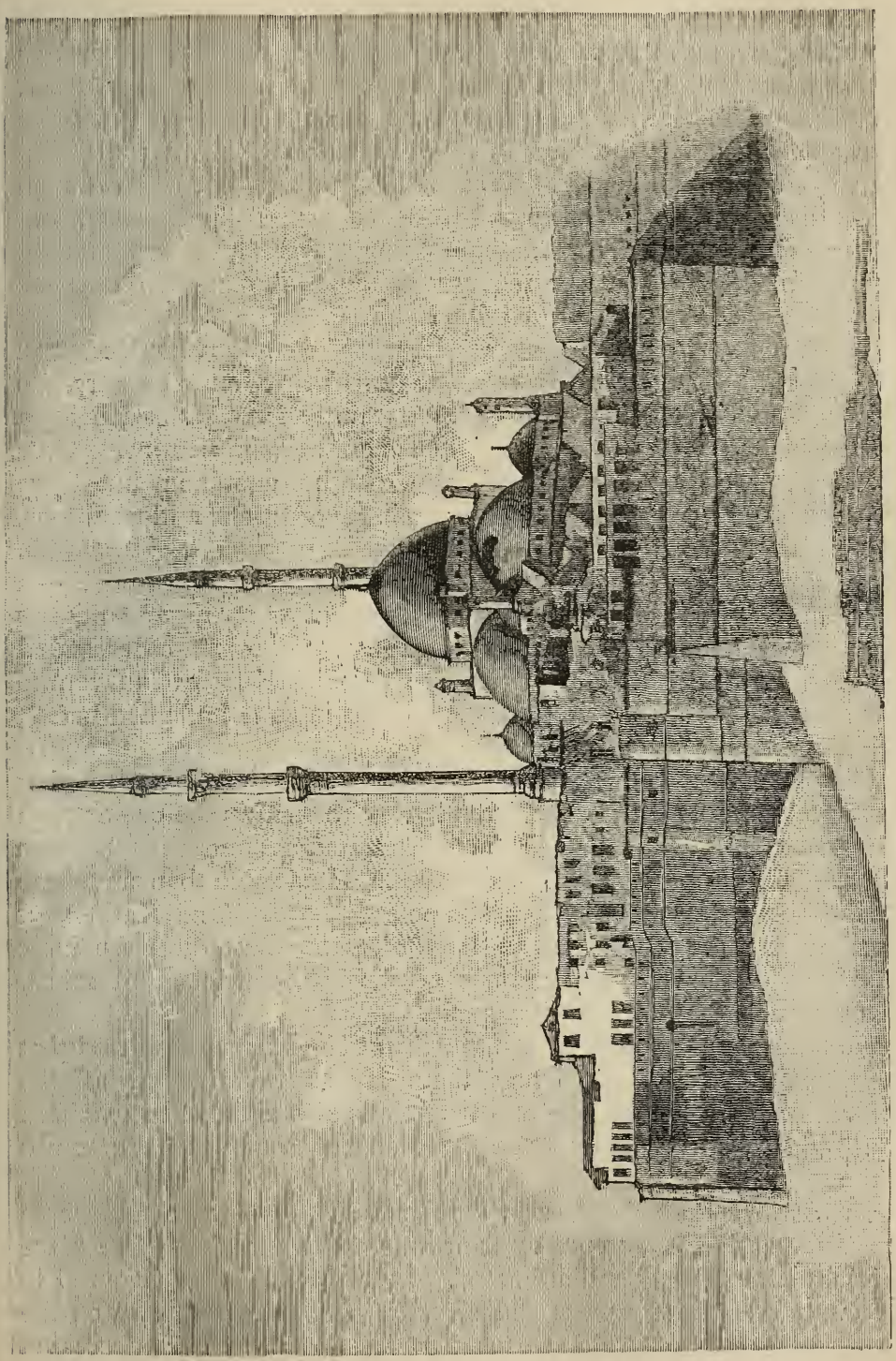
We followed the dervishes through squalid streets, their lanterns throwing ghostly shadows as they walked. Always before us we kept the singular group, whose silent tread scarcely awoke the faintest echo, and added to the element of mystery. Were they conspirators bent upon a modern gunpowder plot?

Not at all. They were simply about to pay their usual devotions to the tomb-mosque of one of their saints, where they would pass the whole night in Zikr. Arrived at the small dome-shaped tomb, they left a lantern outside the doorway, either as a sign that they were engaged within in religious exercise, or as a protection from evil spirits.

Here they pass the night in devotion, and it says much for their earnestness. These long vigils, even the influence of ecstasy admitted, must be a weariness to the flesh that only strong religious faith and fervent zeal could support.

The dervishes are venerated by the people. The tombs of the

saints—walees—are supposed to possess miraculous power, and are much visited by those who are not dervishes. The sick and



THE CITADEL.

suffering are especially found there; they have strong faith in the miraculous, born perhaps of the hope that exists more or less in

every heart: it is so easy to persuade ourselves into what we wish to believe: and these sick Eastern folk, uneducated, narrow in thought, superstitious, desirous of health and strength, pay their devotions to the tomb and think the miraculous will happen. If it fails it is something wrong in themselves; they have been wanting in trust, or have not sufficiently invoked the saint: they may say to each other, "Perchance he sleepeth, or perhaps he is on a journey"; but the power to accomplish the miracle they never doubt. This firm faith, even if misdirected, is good. What should we also not often accomplish, often gain, with all our knowledge and enlightenment, our encouragement to "ask in faith, nothing wavering," if we brought as much conviction into our requests as these followers of a doctrine not sealed with the gift of revelation?

The tombs of the ancient warriors are equally venerated and worshipped. In these cases, courage, devotion to one's country, are supposed to stand in the place of a saintly life. Occasionally a warrior has four or five different tombs in as many towns. Only one tomb—perhaps not always that—can be genuine; but these Eastern people cling tenaciously to their superstitions and traditions, and nothing would induce them to part even with a false tomb. Some of these warriors were the "Companions of the Prophet"—a special distinction—did much for the cause of el-Islam, and possess many traditions. But the greater number of traditions are descended from the Fatimites, a race founded by Fatima, Mohammed's favourite daughter, who married the Khaliff Alee, and in so doing allied herself with a house destined to misfortune.

The inhabitants of the towns, and especially of Cairo, whether dervishes or not, are all more or less given to visiting the cemeteries: held sacred less because they are consecrated ground than because they contain the tombs of their relatives. Here more than anywhere survive some of the traditions of ancient Egypt. The Karifeh, or cemetery outside Cairo, is the largest in the East, and the most important, containing many tombs of sheykhs, warriors and saints, all more or less the objects of worship.

We have already stated how the ancient Egyptians considered that behind every city of the living there lay an invisible city of the dead. But in Cairo the real and tangible is also abundantly manifest. Pilgrimages are constantly made from distant scenes to the tombs of the saints.

There are certain days—holy days and Fridays—when the people rise before the sun and make their way to the tombs. The place becomes almost lively and animated. Palm branches, so favoured in the East, give these crowds the air of a procession; thrown on the tombs, with their graceful leaves and curves, the place looks decorated for a festival. Saints and departed relatives are invoked with fervency; the poor have food and money doled out to them.

The sun rises upon a singular scene: a multitude of kneeling

people in all the picturesqueness of Eastern costume; all intent upon one idea. The palm branches are gilded by the rays of the sun; so are the small cupolas of the tombs, so distinctly Eastern, so solemn and effective.

Not far off are the magnificent tombs of the Mamelukes, beautiful in their decadence; a refined and matchless picture; without rival, without imitation; as though all who had gazed upon them had despaired ever to reproduce these masterpieces of genius.

Above all shines the clear Eastern sky, unbroken by a cloud, especially serene and beautiful at this hour of the morning: the early dawn, when the evening star still shines in the west like a ball of liquid silver, and the sky is full of changing colours: all to vanish and evaporate when the sun makes his appearance, and a broader light gradually floods the landscape.

The East is full of pictures, as it is full of romance, of historical recollections both sacred and profane, dating back to ages compared with which the Western world seems still in its infancy. There is nothing commonplace in the East, nothing to shock artistic taste and feeling; the poorest and most wretched communities have still a harmony of outline and colouring not only due to climate and an unconscious spirit of adaptation, but distinctly an inheritance of the past. This harmony is so general that only those realise it who take the trouble to compare Eastern scenes and life and manners, the architecture of houses, the flowing outlines of dress, with all that is angular and inartistic, all that is so ugly and inharmonious in our own and neighbouring lands.

Amongst the dervishes there are, as we have said, many different orders; and some have very little in common with others. The ways and habits of the Howling Dervishes are not at all the same as those of the Dancing Dervishes: and again both the Howling and Dancing Dervishes are split up into factions and divisions. Each sect has its own belief and peculiarities; but there is no rivalry or jealousy amongst them; no attempt to wrest votaries one from the other; "each goes his way at his own pace," and leaves every other to do likewise. There is even a certain freemasonry of good fellowship running through them all; and when they meet they never omit the picturesque Eastern salutation, so beautiful in idea, though probably too often degenerating, like our handshake, into a mere form and ceremony.

Schism is unknown; possessing the same end and aim, they are indifferent to the roads by which these are attained. Each sect was founded by a particular sheykh or saint; all have their distinctive badge or dress. One sect has white turbans and banners: its members are for the most part fishermen, and in their processions carry nets of many colours. This is the order founded by Abd-el-Kader el-Ghilánee, Guardian of the tomb of Aboo Haneefeh, one of the founders of Islam at Bagdad.

There are four distinct orthodox sects of Islam, yet all based upon the lines laid down by the prophet.

Of another order the turbans and banners are red. These were founded by Ahmed el-Bedawee, the favourite saint of the Arabs, who has his tomb near Tantah, and upon whose virtues we heard Osman discourse.

This order is again divided into three sects; one distinguished by their long hair; the other two carrying wooden swords and a whip; the turban being replaced by high caps ornamented with tufts of coloured cloth, whilst rows of gaudy beads are strung over the breast. Orientals at least possess one taste in common with savages: a love for personal decoration, for cheap and glittering ornaments, and for bright colours. These catch the eye and insensibly affect the imagination.

Again, another sect has its banners and turbans green, and its members will be found in great force at the fairs and festivals of Dessook, one of the chief towns on the way from Alexandria to Cairo.

Few who are not acquainted with the people of Egypt have little idea how large a part the dervishes play in the social affairs of the country. Their mysticism, as we have said, has always forcibly appealed to the Egyptian temperament. The present whirlings began in a very small way; mere swayings of the body as they read or prayed: a movement supposed to assist the mind in becoming absorbed in religious devotion. The idea grew, and in time became exaggerated.

These whirlings are now turned into a sort of miracle. The performer presently grows giddy, sight goes from him, his senses leave him, his mind becomes sometimes a blank, sometimes a degree of madness. At the end of from ten to twenty minutes, according to his temperament, he falls often in convulsions, foaming at the mouth. Physical exhaustion has set in.

The people now consider him possessed with the divine spirit: all mortal and bodily functions are suspended: he is in the regions of ecstasy. Another whirling dervish takes his place; and so it goes on: sometimes one solitary dervish performing, at others ten or twelve all whirling together; no skirt touching another; arms thrown wildly upward; eyes glowing like coals of fire; all, essentially mad for the time being. Probably some go permanently mad; whilst some may even die in their delirium. The whole time they are shouting the name of Allah; but at last the words become a sort of croon, in which no syllable can be distinguished.

At the time of their festivals—the birthday of the prophet is the greatest of these—they go through the ceremony of *Treading*, which they call the *Dawsah.* It is perhaps the most insincere, the nearest approach to charlatanism, of all their performances.

The sheykh has passed the night in prayer and fasting, supposed to be necessary to that point of ecstasy which will work the

View from the Citadel.

miracle. At noon a cannon is fired from the Citadel, signal for the ceremony to commence. A multitude has been collecting since early morning, standing in the blazing heat, growing more and more excited. A large body of soldiers, sent to keep order, add to the animation of the scene. The report of the cannon has scarcely died away when the sheykh mounts his horse and rides through a prescribed boundary, followed by a fanatical mob. The people placing absolute faith in the miracle, prostrate themselves on either side, throw themselves in front of the horse, and allow it to pass over them. The dervishes profess that they may be kicked, yet no harm will follow. As a matter of fact the foolish people are often taken up injured and insensible. Flags and trumpets are flying and sounding everywhere, carried by certain orders of dervishes. Everything is done to arouse fanaticism. The road is strewn with men's bodies closely packed; over these the horse passes as lightly as he may tread, and the greater number of devotees escape injury. A slight kick from the horse is accounted a special blessing; but a serious injury probably awakens the victim to reason.

The sheykh himself is dressed according to his order, wearing a green turban. He is old and dignified. His face is upraised in ecstasy; he seems to behold a vision that is far off and invisible to ordinary eyes: a state of mind probably more real than assumed, the result of long vigil and fasting. The horse he rides is not shod—happily for the victims. When all is over they are smuggled away to have their injuries attended to, and to recover their senses.

Many attempts have been made to put down this ceremony of the Dawsah; just as, some years ago, it was endeavoured to put down the bull-fights in Spain. But it is difficult to abolish anything established by long-continued custom if it interferes with the prejudices of the people; and the bull-fight and the Dawsah still hold their own. True, the one appeals to the earthly and sensual in human nature, whilst the other is supposed to minister to the spiritual; but it would be well if both came to an end. Yet the Spanish king found that the reformation would jeopardize his throne; and the Khedive replied, when the matter was brought before him: "I am not strong enough to do this thing."

Let us for a moment turn to a more peaceful scene; the contemplation of glories in which man plays little part.

Leaving the more modern Cairo, the region of hotels, and new streets and houses, where at sundry corners donkey-boys are invading "tourists"—that odious modern word, which has become as applicable as it is universal—we pass into narrower, more typical thoroughfares, on our way to the Citadel. Here and there the immense portal and gigantic walls of a mosque cause us to linger in wonder and admiration. The streets are crowded with a motley gathering. Turbans of every shade and colour are in evidence;

varying costumes, all having their interpretation. The men are much in the majority; but here and there a woman passes in her hideous face-disguise, looking for all the world like a being set apart by some loathsome malady. Instead of this, she may be beautiful as a houri, captivating as a syren. We gave each the benefit of the doubt, and decided to consider ourselves surrounded by angels wanting only wings to fit them for Paradise.

We pass on our way, for we have one end in view—the Citadel. It is evening and the sun is going down. The walk is long and tiring, and steep towards the end. Most of the time the Citadel is in evidence, perched upon high rocks and looking impregnable. It is also strongly fortified. The Citadel was first built in 1166, by Saladin, and many of the original portions remain. Above it rises the Mosque of Mohammed Ali, with its wonderful dome and slender minarets. Outlined against the clear evening sky it seems less a reality than a dream picture, possessing a charm and beauty beyond all earthly dreams.

At length we reach a gateway which admits us within the citadel walls: a gateway large and massive, and flanked by two towers: a magnificent structure, meant to defy the ages. Within the walls lies quite a town, full of objects of interest.

Not pausing this evening to examine these objects, we pass to yet higher ground, and are soon on a level with the Mosque, which, seen from all the surrounding country, has so long been a reality to us by day, a vision haunting our dreams by night. Close to it, we see that it is substantial enough. Its walls are not mere ethereal outlines, vanishing to the touch, but solid and very costly material.

We do not enter the Mosque this evening, but turn to the outer walls, where we overlook the city, the far-off country and the lowering sun. It is indeed a wonderful view: as much a vision as anything we shall see ever in Cairo or elsewhere. At our feet lies the busy hive, teeming with Eastern life. Its flat roofs are conspicuous, its narrow, tortuous streets seem countless as they lie clearly mapped out before us. The Tombs of the Mamelukes, their fawn-coloured tone so much like the pale sand of the desert, stand out in their matchless beauty, their eternal solitude and silence. The rarefied atmosphere diminishes the distance of the far-off objects. Crowds of people in a wide, open space below seem on the verge of a tumult. Aleck our dragoman says they are the faithful going to market or to mosque: nothing more formidable, nothing more deadly. They are so far off that it is like looking upon a panorama of animated but silent beings—no sound reaches us even through this wonderful air. We notice a long string of heavily-laden camels plodding their weary way amongst them; probably a caravanserai just arrived from across the desert, and about to unload in the bazaars. We look down upon an infinite number of mosques, trace many of their courts, some of which are in partial ruin. The sun has almost reached the horizon, and a

flood of golden light almost glorifies the city, gilds many a dome and minaret, many a palm-tree, suggesting a passage in the Revelation: "And I saw the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven, adorned as a bride for her husband." No earthly scene could more closely approach the vision of St. John the Divine.

Beyond, we trace the windings of the Nile, that ancient and sacred river to which Egypt owes everything. It, too, catches the rays of the setting sun and is flooded with gold and flashing with jewels, dying out in the blue distance. We picture its course for 1800 miles, every inch of the way full of interest, memorials of the past, ruins and monuments that are nothing less than voices from the dead. We carry our gaze yet beyond the city, and not far from the Nile we see the forms of the Great Pyramids clearly outlined against the sky, the sad Libyan Hills in the far-off background. Their immense size is lost, but they look full of majesty and dignity, full of a strange inexpressible repose. One feels that they might be fitting tombs for our first parents, who, banished from the first Paradise, might here be awaiting the second: shrines, resting-places at which to offer the tears of regret, the homage of devotion; for if sin came into the world through them, so also through them man became heir to a yet greater life and immortality. Made lower than the angels, he is destined to rise above them.

Beyond all stretches the pathless desert, the boundless horizon: a perfect picture of immensity and solitude. To such a spot would David have hastened when he cried in his sorrow: "Oh that I had the wings of a dove, that I might flee away!" Such must Mendelssohn have realised when those celestial strains flowed from him: "In the wilderness build me a nest, and remain there for ever at rest."

The words haunted us as we looked that evening upon this boundless desert, of which we yet only saw the beginning. In spirit we were once more assisting at that wonderful Temple service, on the banks of another but less classical river; where many a time we have listened to a boy's pure voice, echoing through those wonderful arches, pulsing and waving through those solemn aisles, the words in their repetition finding an echo in one's very heart's core: "In the wilderness build me a nest, and remain there for ever at rest." Again and yet again they echo forth as if the composer had been unable himself to pass away from the words and felt all the charm of the state which for him was realised all too soon, though not in any earthly sense: "In the wilderness build me a nest, and remain there for ever at rest." Succeeded later on by the calm, clear, convincing voice of the Master, who for us has no equal, reminding his hearers that the spirit may find a yet more perfect rest and peace than it would discover if sought for ever in desert solitudes.

We gazed from those walls until the sun went down. The flood of gold disappeared; the heavenly was shut out, only the earthly remained.

It is always so. Very soon the desert faded, the Pyramids became vague outlines in the mists of twilight, then invisible. We pictured the Sphinx keeping watch and ward over them, its sleepless gaze turned towards the regions of immortality: all its mystery, its weird influence most felt when darkness falls and the stars pursue their silent course through the deepening sky. A grey mist fell upon the city as we looked this evening; lights began to gleam; a cool breeze sprang up as the sun disappeared. The afterglow with all its brilliant effects was soon over. Twilight does not linger here; rapid the transition from light to dark—and from darkness to light again.

It was time to turn away. We seemed to have been in touch with a celestial vision whilst gazing upon the most ancient historical ground the world contains. Here for untold ages and people and tongues had the sun risen and set over these vast and solitary desert plains: and here for ages yet to come will he run his course, when he who writes, and you, fair friend, who read, shall have passed into a Land that has no need of the sun by day, nor of the moon by night, for the glory of GOD doth lighten it.

(*To be continued.*)

ALONE.

THE skies are grey, the year is old,
The wind is moaning through the town;
It comes from the far wood and wold,
By pastures desolate and brown.
The last leaves flutter from the bough,
Pale lamps shine dully through the mist,
What of the summer woodlands now
Where we two kissed?

The rain is dripping from the sky,
It splashes in the muddy street;
Beside my burnt-out fire sit I
And hear the sound of hurrying feet.
They come, they go, they never stay;
My house is left me desolate;
No footstep ever, any day,
Stops at my gate!

E. NESBIT.

THE MANAGER'S SAFE.

By George Fosbery.

"WHAT are you doing there?"

"Nothing, sir."

The answer came from a pale and feeble-looking youth, standing before the open safe in the sanctum of the manager of the Continental Banking Corporation Limited, Old Broad Street, E.C.

The question had been put by the manager himself on re-entering his room after a momentary absence in the outer office. The clerk, for such was the young man's position in the bank, flushed to the roots of his hair, as the manager thrust him aside, and ostentatiously secured the door to the safe.

Nothing more passed between the two. The clerk laid a slip of paper with figures written upon it on the manager's table; and having thus apparently fulfilled the duty which brought him thither he went out, closing the door gently behind him.

The manager watched him as he retired, watched him through a transparent pane in the glass door after he had retired, watched him as he took his hat from a peg, and watched him with especial eagerness as he passed through the swing doors on the way out (no doubt) to dinner; and the expression in the face of the great man might have suggested to a witness, if there had been one, the existence of some grave suspicion regarding the security of the contents of the safe. After making an examination of the papers shut in behind the iron door, in order to satisfy himself that they had or had not been tampered with, and after transferring some papers from the safe to a drawer of his writing-table which he locked up again quickly, an occupation that seemed to suggest grave and moody reflections, and during which he looked around him frequently to see that he was alone—the manager turned his attention to the slip which had been placed on his table by the young man who had just left the room.

Upon the slip were written these figures:

"£10,000 to-morrow, Saturday. Messrs. Bulling & Co. will call for the second lot of bonds early on Monday."

"Ten thousand pounds!" he muttered. "Saturday. What an opportunity!—this is Friday—if I can wait till to-morrow!"

The manager pressed his hand to his forehead, and gave up his thoughts to some problem that weighed upon him. Presently he shook off this moodiness, and reaching out his arm, gave two sharp strokes to a hand-bell standing beside his inkstand. The double signal was a summons for the chief cashier, who answered it without delay.

"Come in, Mr. Price. Shut the door, if you please."

The cashier did as he was bidden and came to the manager's table, to hear what that gentleman had to say. But the latter did not speak, he stood facing his colleague, and looking into his eyes with a scared expression of countenance. Mr. Price was startled.

"Anything the matter, sir?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

The manager did not reply. He appeared to be steadying himself, to be suppressing an excitement which was entirely unusual with him. When he spoke at last, he seemed anxious to prove to himself that his memory had not failed him.

"What time was it, Mr. Price, when you and I went down to the strong-room this morning?"

"It was precisely twelve o'clock, sir."

"You remember what bonds and securities I handed to you there?"

"Perfectly."

"Please to confirm my memory by enumerating them?"

"Certainly, sir." And the cashier told them off on his fingers. When he had finished, the manager reminded him that there was still one lot of securities which he had omitted to mention. Did Mr. Price recall what they were?

"To be sure, sir! how stupid of me! There were also Messrs. Bulling & Co.'s first lot of £1,000 bonds."

"For what amount?"

"Why, sir, you know as well as I do. They amount to £8,000."

"You placed them all in the usual letter-basket, did you not?"

"Yes, sir. But you were present yourself."

"Quite so, quite so. My observation, however, has failed me, and I am anxious to take up the clue through you."

"I don't quite understand," began Mr. Price; but his chief interrupted him.

"You placed Messrs. Bulling's documents in the basket with all the others—under my eyes. You brought the basket to my room here—under my eyes. Finally, you deposited the basket and its contents in my safe here—under my very eyes. Your memory confirms mine, does it not?"

"Assuredly."

"What time is it now?"

"Striking one, sir."

"When do Messrs. Bulling come for this first batch of bonds?

"They will take them away at two o'clock."

"They cannot take them away."

"Why not?" asked the cashier with surprise.

"They are gone already."

"Gone! What do you mean?"

"They have been stolen! You had better see for yourself. Here is the key."

Mr. Price opened the safe, and made a careful search. In two minutes he convinced himself that the bonds were missing from the safe, and in five minutes more he satisfied himself that they were not in the room; unless, indeed, they were locked in the manager's desk —an alternative which was instantly dismissed from his mind.

"I am entirely at a loss," he began.

"So am I, Mr. Price," broke in the manager. "I have not left the room since you deposited the bonds in that safe. It is true, the door of the safe has been standing open most of the time. But, on the other hand, I have received no visitors; not a soul has entered the room but yourself."

"You forget, sir, that one of the clerks, young Mr. Aspin, brought you a slip from me about the second batch of securities which are to be withdrawn from the custody of the Bank of England to-morrow, Saturday—£10,000 worth, the receipt for which is, I believe, in your possession."

The manager made no remark in response to the latter assertions —concerning the bonds and the receipt believed to be in his possession. But he referred significantly to the young clerk and his errand.

"Yes, Mr. Aspin was here for a few moments. I don't like to suggest any suspicion against him——"

The manager hesitated. Mr. Price followed up the thread.

"It *is* somewhat suspicious, sir, that Mr. Aspin was actually alone in this room for nearly half a minute, having entered by this door, from behind the counter, at the very moment you were standing on the other side of yonder door opening on the outer office, while a customer asked you a question."

"That is perfectly true, Price. I had not thought of that. Moreover—now that I come to recall the circumstance—young Aspin was stooping over the open safe in a most suspicious manner, when I re-entered the room."

"Subject to your approval, sir, I will question him before you take any steps towards announcing the loss. He is a very respectable youth, and may be perfectly innocent."

"I don't like to think for a moment that he is otherwise, Mr. Price. Bring him here at once."

"I will do so—unless he has gone out. One o'clock is his dinner-time." Mr. Price advanced to the door, but the manager stopped him.

"Wait a moment, Price. The suspicion is a very serious one. Let us omit no precaution. We will make one more search."

Mr. Price assented. Going on his knees before the open safe, he turned out each and every paper within, and replaced it in turn. The bonds were *not* there. He went round the room likewise. The bonds were nowhere to be seen.

"Enough!" at length exclaimed the manager. "Fetch Mr. Aspin. And, before you bring him in, give instructions to your next in command, that no officer is to leave the bank on any pretence whatever, till I give permission to the contrary."

"Yes, sir; it will be just as well to do so without further loss of time."

As soon as the manager heard the door close, he looked around him to make sure that he was alone. Then, taking his keys from his pocket, he unlocked softly the drawer beneath his writing desk, wheeled back his chair a few inches, unlocked the safe, and paused.

He appeared to listen for an instant. There was no sound of approaching footsteps; there was no shadow on either of the ground-glass doors of anyone about to enter. With a rapidity and stealthiness that denoted both fear and determination, he abstracted a parcel from the drawer, stepped across to the safe, slipped the packet between the leaves of a ledger within the safe, secured the iron door, returned to his table, locked the drawer, put the keys in his pocket, drew up his chair, and returned to his former position.

But some peculiarity of the packet had been noticed by him notwithstanding the rapidity of the action.

"There is surely one missing. There ought to have been eight."

Some two minutes had elapsed when the cashier returned alone. The manager still sat in the same attitude. Apparently, he had not moved during the other's absence. He started as Mr. Price spoke to him.

"I am sorry to say, sir, that young Aspin went out immediately after you noticed his suspicious presence in this room. There is nothing to be done but to wait till he returns at two o'clock."

"What if he should *not* return?" said the manager.

"If he is innocent, he will return as a matter of course. And, if he is guilty, he will return to allay suspicion. His failure to return would be his condemnation."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"But, consider," said the manager, "Messrs. Bulling & Co. will come for their bonds at two o'clock. No explanation which we can at present give will reconcile them to the temporary loss of their property."

Mr. Price reflected for a while. He seemed to be more ready of resource than his superior officer.

"You, sir, had better go yourself immediately to Scotland Yard to give notice of this robbery to the police. I will receive Messrs. Bulling, and explain to them that you have been suddenly summoned thither on extremely urgent business. I will ask them to call again an hour later."

"Admirable!" exclaimed the manager, appreciatively. "By three o'clock, we shall have discovered something either from Mr. Aspin or otherwise."

"I hope so."

"By the way, Mr. Price," added the manager finally, "here is the key of my writing-table." He detached it from the bunch which hung on a chain secured round his waist. "Please to look through every drawer, and satisfy yourself that the missing bonds have not merely been mislaid."

"I will do so, sir." And as the manager buttoned up his tight-fitting frock coat and clapped on his high hat, Mr. Price involuntarily reflected that the lost documents could not have transferred themselves miraculously to the manager's pockets without the fact disturbing fatally the admirable cut of that gentleman's garments.

"No official may leave the bank on any pretext whatever till I return from Scotland Yard," said the manager.

Mr. Price bowed acquiescence, and in a moment more the manager left him.

Presently the cashier summed up the situation. "I've turned out the safe twice, and seen it locked. I can affirm that Messrs. Bulling's bonds are not there. I've turned out the drawers of this writing-table. The bonds are not here. The manager has not got them. I didn't take 'em. Young Aspin must have done it. Will he come back? He's nearly due now."

Two o'clock struck, but Mr. Aspin had not returned. Messrs. Bulling sent a trusted messenger for the bonds. Mr. Price made the necessary excuse, and requested him to return at three-thirty. Half-past-two came, but no sign of Mr. Aspin. Indeed, when the manager returned, shortly after three o'clock, accompanied by detectives, Mr. Aspin had not yet put in an appearance. In short, Mr. Aspin did not return. He had bolted, evidently.

And this is how it came to pass. On leaving the bank at half-past one, the manager crossed the street, and, instead of hurrying to Scotland Yard, placed himself in the shadow of a doorway, where he could not be perceived through the ground-glass windows of the bank, and where he had a full view of the street to right and left.

He watched here for about five or ten minutes, when the figure of Mr. Aspin, on his return from dinner, was perceived coming down the street on the opposite side.

Before the young man reached the steps of the bank, he was stopped by the manager, who said sharply—

"Follow me!"

The manager walked briskly along, looking back frequently, in order to see that his command was attended to. The miserable boy dared not disobey. Presently, in an unfrequented side street, the manager hailed a hansom. He beckoned Mr. Aspin to seat himself beside him within the cab.

"Scotland Yard!" cried the manager to the driver. "And put the glass down."

On hearing their destination, Aspin turned as white as a sheet.

Before he could recover himself enough to speak, the manager informed him that the theft of Messrs. Bulling & Co.'s bonds had been discovered, and that the suspicions which pointed to Mr. Aspin as the thief were simply overwhelming.

This announcement frightened Mr. Aspin so much that he tried to jump out of the hansom; but he was held back in a powerful grip.

"No, no, young man, you must listen to me. I do not wish to be hard on you, even if you are indeed guilty. You must perceive by this time that you are ruined for life, if the guilt attaches to you——"

"I know it, I know it!" exclaimed the youth, breaking into tears. "What will my poor mother say?"

The manager showed some astonishment at the boy's burst of grief. Presently, however, he continued:

"Look here, young sir! I will help you out of this mess—ahem!—for your mother's sake!"

"Oh, sir! God bless you for saying that!"

"I mean it too; your escape can be managed. I impose a condition, however. It is this. You will take train immediately for Dover. You will cross to Calais. I will throw everybody off the scent. You will travel through, without stopping, to Spain. There you will be safe from arrest."

"But I have no money."

"I will provide for that. Here is a fifty-pound note. You will go to Gaze's Tourist Office in the Strand, and buy two tickets for Madrid."

"Why two tickets, sir?"

"To avert suspicion. One of them you will use yourself; the other I will take care of myself. At Madrid you will stay at the Hotel de Paris, till you receive from me another fifty-pound note—ahem!—for your mother's sake."

"Oh, sir, how can I thank you?"

"After that you must make your own way in the world—abroad—in America—in any country where our police cannot find you."

"I will, sir—I will. I shall never forget your kindness."

"Say no more. We will get out here." And the manager stopped the cab.

"But, if you please, sir, here's the bond; I will give it back to you."

"What bond?" asked the manager, with a start.

"The thousand-pound bond I stole, sir," whimpered the lad. "It was on the top of the bundle. I was afraid to take the rest."

The manager looked at him with blank astonishment in his face as Aspin drew a paper from within his waistcoat and handed it over. It was one of Messrs. Bulling & Co.'s securities—"Payable to Bearer."

The manager gazed first at the bond, then at the boy. The bewilderment in the great man's face gave way to a curious smile.

"You are right," he said at last. "I will take care of it."

They descended from the cab a few yards off Gaze's Tourist Office, and the manager paid the driver.

"You know what you have to do," said he to Aspin, pointing to the name over the door. "I will wait for you here."

When the clerk emerged again from Messrs. Gaze's, he handed one of the two tickets he had purchased to the manager, who said quickly—

"Good-bye! And, by the way, remember that I shall follow you now and see you off—from a distance."

Next morning Mr. Aspin was in Paris. There the devil in him revived to some extent. He determined to spend a couple of days in the "City of Pleasure," and to have a spree. Had not the manager promised to throw everyone off the scent?

Meantime, the manager strolled down to Scotland Yard. There he gave his reasons for believing that a theft of valuable bonds had taken place. It was impossible to say how and by whom they had been abstracted. He desired that an able detective should return with him to the city, to make an investigation and give his advice. The request was promptly complied with.

Shortly before three o'clock the manager entered the bank, accompanied by two detectives from the Criminal Investigation Department—namely, Inspector Crump and another officer in plain clothes. They were met by the cashier with the significant announcement that young Mr. Aspin had not returned after his dinner-hour.

"There can be no doubt," added Mr. Price, "that our suspicions of him were well-founded."

The manager and the chief detective retired to the sanctum of the former. Mr. Price and the second police officer were asked to hold themselves in readiness for a summons to join them.

The circumstances already detailed in the conversation between the manager and cashier were forthwith communicated to the Inspector. The manager, moreover, opened the safe, and described how the various parcels of bonds brought from the strong room had been laid in a row on the middle shelf; and how he had perceived, almost immediately after Mr. Aspin had left the room, a gap in the row where Messrs. Bulling & Co.'s script had been laid. The Inspector was then requested to make a careful survey of the room and its contents.

While he was doing this, the manager deftly slipped a paper from his pocket into the leaves of a ledger within the safe, much in the same manner, it will be remembered, as he had acted with another packet. Having done this, he "swung to" the door, which fastened with a snap.

During this operation, Inspector Crump was looking in the opposite direction. But he was doing so to some purpose; for he saw the movements of the manager clearly reflected in the ground-glass partition separating the apartment from the general office. There was something about the manager's action which fixed the circumstance in his mind.

The detective next interviewed the cashier, whose story confirmed that of his superior officer.

Now the duty of the detective was clear. Even if there remained a doubt as to Mr. Aspin's guilt, it was absolutely necessary to discover what had become of that young gentleman. Inquiry was therefore made of his colleagues in the office; but no one could offer a clue to the missing clerk's movements.

"He has probably made for the Continent," suggested the manager.

"Do you think so, sir?" asked Inspector Crump, in reply, while he looked in the face of the banker. "If so, we will soon overtake him; he hasn't much more than an hour's start of the telegraph." And the detective laughed. The idea appeared to impress the manager.

"The law has a long arm—eh, Mr. Crump?"

"Yes, sir—particularly in dealing with boys who have short heads," said the detective, eyeing the manager steadily.

"I hope you'll prove a match for him," said the manager, with a smile.

"I think we shall, sir. By-the-bye, I suppose he couldn't make anything out of the bonds in this country?"

"It is very unlikely."

"Do you think, sir, that he had any money about him to go away with?"

"I cannot say; but I'll inquire."

The answer brought by Mr. Price to this inquiry was one that provoked a hearty laugh.

"Mr. Aspin was 'hard up.' He was always 'hard up.' He had borrowed half-a-crown that very morning to pay for his dinner."

After some further information as to Mr. Aspin's affairs had been asked for by Mr. Crump, and given to him, that gentleman decided to make inquiries of Mrs. Aspin, and to have that lady's house watched in case her son should return home.

"I will also cause a description of young Aspin to be circulated in order that he may be traced, watched, and, if possible, arrested. All this will keep us occupied till to-morrow morning, when you may expect me here to report progress. I will leave my companion with you. He may be wanted."

Inspector Crump departed, after whispering to his comrade the curious admonition: "Watch the manager. If he hasn't got the bonds himself, my name's not Crump!"

When Mr. Bulling, of Messrs. Bulling & Company, called for their securities, an explanation was given for not delivering them which bore all the appearance of good faith. The fact of the theft was more unfortunate than alarming, for, of course, the Bank would make good the loss. Under the unhappy circumstances, Messrs. Bulling & Company consented to fall in with the Bank's convenience, and to wait until the lost property should be recovered, while the manager,

on behalf of the directors, offered temporary security to the owners of the bonds—an offer which they considered unnecessary, in view of the status of the Bank.

At ten o'clock the following morning Inspector Crump arrived in Old Broad Street. He was greeted by the manager and some of the directors of the Corporation. The detective addressed himself to the manager with a confidence and respect which set that gentleman entirely at his ease.

"The supposition you expressed, sir, has been fully justified. The young man suspected of stealing the bonds crossed to Calais yesterday. I have arranged that he will not slip through our fingers. I cannot say more at present. The first information which I obtained concerning him was given by Messrs. Gaze, the tourist agents, at whose office he bought two tickets for Madrid. From the fact of his taking two tickets, it is presumed that he is travelling in company with a female, possibly an accomplice. He paid Messrs. Gaze with a fifty-pound note, of which I have taken the number. The question is, Where did he get the fifty-pound note? Can you tell me?"

At first the manager made no reply, and he averted his eyes under the steady but seemingly frank regard of the detective. Then, labouring under evident excitement, he stepped over to the safe, opened it, drew out a little drawer within, and exclaimed:

"Good heavens, that's gone too!"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I had a fifty-pound note, in this drawer." He referred to his pocket-book for the number and read it out. The detective smiled as he announced that his figures were the same. The directors looked at one another meaningly, being full of sympathy for their head official.

At this moment, Mr. Price entered and reminded the manager of an appointment at the Bank of England, an appointment (it will be remembered) to exchange a receipt of the Bank of England for £10,000 worth of bonds deposited there and belonging to Messrs. Bulling. The manager made his excuses to the directors, promised to be back in half-an-hour, and went out.

As soon as Inspector Crump knew him to be off the premises, he turned to the directors and said sharply:

"Gentlemen, you must excuse me if I am abrupt. I am acting in your interests, and I am obliged to be plain-spoken. I will stake my reputation that the man who has just left the room is responsible for the disappearance of Messrs. Bulling & Company's bonds."

"No, no, no! Impossible! Impossible!" ejaculated his worthy listeners, throwing up their hands in deprecation of the wrong done to their faithful servant by the mere suggestion.

"I beg pardon," said the detective. "I am accustomed to read guilt or innocence in a man's manners, as well as his actions. Your manager tries to hide from me a guilty conscience and he cannot do it."

"What right have you to say such things?" asked the indignant Board of Directors in one voice.

The Inspector continued in his own way.

"From what I hear of the boy Aspin, he hasn't the pluck to steal and hide a great parcel of bonds. He hadn't even an opportunity of doing so, without the certainty of the manager seeing them protruding from his pocket. The lad may have stolen the fifty-pound note, or he may have had it given to him; but, take my word for it, in this unfortunate business, he is more sinned against than sinning."

"If that is all you have to say," broke in the chairman of the Board of Directors, "we shall be obliged by your keeping your opinions to yourself, and confining yourself to your duty."

"It is my duty to warn you, sir," retorted the detective. "The manager has averted suspicion by throwing it on Mr. Aspin. I don't know if Aspin is his dupe or his confederate, or both. But we must not lose sight of the manager till we have had it out with Aspin. Not that the young one has the bonds. The old one has the bonds himself, or he has posted them to Spain."

"Spain!" exclaimed the directors.

"Yes," and the Inspector laughed, "no extradition treaty between this country and Spain, you see."

"But, if the manager is the culprit, why has he risked detection by staying here?"

"Why, sir, because he hasn't got all the bonds he wants, I should say."

"Monstrous! Perfectly monstrous!" declared the directors unconvinced.

"Besides," urged one of them, "he could not reach Spain before his absence was discovered, and we could overtake him by telegraph."

"Think so, sir?" said the detective. "Why, he might slip off unperceived to-night, be in Paris on Sunday morning, and across the Spanish frontier before you gentlemen are awake on Monday. Then where are you?"

The directors could hardly fail to appreciate these remarks, although they still remained incredulous.

"There is not the slightest foundation," urged one of them, "for suspecting that the manager has any intention whatever of running away to Spain or anywhere else."

"Excuse me, sir," returned the detective, "but it is my business to suspect. Please to remember that although Mr. Aspin has absconded, we have only the manager's story against him. We ought to hear what the young man has to say. Remember, that the bonds were in the manager's possession, and that the missing fifty-pound note was the manager's. How do we know that the second tourist's ticket to Spain is not for the manager's use? I have ascertained for a fact that Mr. Aspin had no companion with him."

"Then what is your advice, Mr. Crump?"

"My advice, gentlemen, is—treat the manager as usual, and wait till he runs away with all he can lay hands on!"

At this curious counsel, the several elderly gentlemen constituting the Board of Directors of the Continental Banking Corporation uttered one cry of fear and astonishment.

"But why not arrest him at once?"

"Because he has possibly provided against that event, by sending away the bonds he stole yesterday, and we could prove nothing."

"What on earth then, are we to do?"

"Treat him just as usual, I say—just as if nothing had happened, gentlemen. Leave the rest to me."

When the manager returned, he carried a small black bag in his hand. This he locked up in his safe. One of the directors suggested that any valuable papers ought to be deposited in the strong room. But the manager demurred.

"They will be safe enough here," he declared, in a casual manner.

The directors began to suspect in their hearts that there might be some wisdom in attending to the detective's warning. They took care, however, not to betray themselves.

* * * * * *

It was comparatively early on Sunday morning, before the good Paris folk had sat down to *déjeuner*, that Mr. Aspin, having thoroughly enjoyed his short sojourn in the French capital, betook himself to the railway station where he intended to take train in his flight towards sanctuary.

But his steps were arrested before the scene of an accident in the street. A little crowd was collecting round a hired conveyance which had been upset. The occupant, a middle-aged man with a dark beard, had been thrown out, and was stunned by the fall. A hand-bag lay close beside him; it had burst open, and some of the contents were slipping from its mouth.

One of these papers Mr. Aspin raised out of the mud. As he did so a cry of surprise escaped him; the document was the very same bond, belonging to Messrs. Bulling and Company, which he had stolen and restored.

A couple of bystanders attempted to raise the fallen stranger. Their efforts displaced a false beard, which fell to the ground and disclosed to Mr. Aspin's astonished eyes the features of the manager of the Continental Banking Corporation.

"You know this gentleman?" asked a voice in English, and a hand was laid on Aspin's shoulder.

"I—I—I—thought I did!" stammered the lad, fearing to betray himself.

"You had better say 'yes' at once, Mr. Aspin. I am a detective from Scotland Yard, and I presume that this gentleman is the person I expected to find sooner or later in your company."

The young man made a virtue of necessity. He allowed himself to be taken back to England in tow, and confessed his share in the robbery of the bank—a point which went in his favour in settling up.

The manager followed later, also in tow. He was scarcely let off so easily as the lad Aspin, and he is not likely to do any banking for some years to come.

* * * * * *

"How did the manager escape?" said Inspector Crump, deeply mortified at having been "bested," in spite of all his suspicions and all his precautions.

"Why, it was this way. The manager goes home that Saturday afternoon, looking as innocent as a saint, and carrying a hand-bag crammed full of bonds.

"So I says to him, 'Not much fear of my troubling you, sir, till Monday. That young rascal Aspin won't betray himself all at once, I guess, wherever he is now. We must be content to watch him.'

"Says the manager, 'I want a little rest badly. This affair has upset me terribly. Don't worry me if you can help it, on the Sabbath day!' 'I won't, sir,' says I.

"I put my watchers on—one in front, and the other behind, his private residence. They were both good men. But he fooled one of them entirely. Just as the evening was getting dark, the parlour-maid hails a four-wheeler from the stand opposite, and brings a Gladstone bag along, and out comes a gent muffled up to the eyes, and cabby is told to drive to Euston like mad. My man stationed in front of the house follows in haste, believing it to be the manager. It wasn't! *He* started two minutes later, and landed at Charing Cross, while my man was messing about the London and North Western Railway.

"How did I find it out? Why, I went round as usual to see how my men were getting on, and I found one gone. Up I marches to the cab stand, asks a cabby some questions. Front man on the rank says he was hailed to the house, but a growler got the fare to Euston. Presently another gent leaves the house in another growler. He describes this gentleman and says he heard him holloa 'Charing Cross.' That's how I knew.

"And then I telegraphed on to Folkstone, Dover, and Paris, mighty sharp, but the manager disguised himself before he got to Dover; and, by Jove! if it hadn't been for the carriage accident in Paris, we should have lost him!"

AN OLD MAN'S DARLING.

By C. J. Langston.

I REALLY am the wrong side uppermost of middle age; but methinks I should feel surprised, and a sense of personal injury, if any one told me so. We are such creatures of contradiction even to ourselves. I had been in the thick of the battle of life, "stormed at by shot and shell," and yet never felt the keen point of an arrow from Cupid's bow—at least, never *seriously* wounded; for there was that fair face, when I was still in my teens, of Mary G., those large lustrous eyes, like an Eastern dove, surrounded by an aureola of golden curls, so suddenly to become the saint she looked; for the face faded into cloudland, and was sent only to remind one of heaven.

Bonnie nephews and nieces—why will they grow so tall?—repeatedly declare—"Oh, Uncle Fred will never marry!" Probably the wish is father to the thought. Possibly they may have heard of contingent reversions.

"Nothing happens but the unforeseen." I am no longer billet-doux and bullet-proof. I haul down my colours. The citadel is taken without assault. I expect no mercy from my fifty particular friends; yet suffer me to plead extenuating circumstances.

I was deeply interested in the case of my young friend, Victor B., one of Nature's royal lineage, every inch a king. Above the ordinary height, and unusually handsome, his dark flashing eye and haughty demeanour struck fire from the heart of a young lady as unyielding as himself. Alas, he was credited with the only crime which Mrs. Grundy never forgives—poverty! Her parents declared that she might have any one else, ample dowry, every comfort; but such an alliance was not to be thought of.

"The men you suggest to me," protested the indignant girl, "are mere puppets. Must I stoop to conquer them?"

"Dora, consider society," replied her mother.

"Would you sacrifice me to society! Never, if I can help it!"

"Well, then, your own set, your friends."

"I tell you, mother, Victor towers above all, and now that I know he loves me, I will never—*never*——"

"Hush! hush! Don't say another word just now."

I was appealed to as a friend of both families, as a sedate old bachelor, not likely to be moved by sentiment, especially such a sentiment as love. I was entreated to call upon Miss L., and, as the confidential friend of *her* friend, she received me with charming docility.

Perhaps she divined, with a woman's shrewdness, where lay my sympathy. However, "England expects, etc.," and I duly decanted the fine old crusted platitudes and arguments against love and cottage bread. "Had she really considered the severance of social ties, the sacrifice of ease, position——"

"Not position. Mine will be higher than ever with him."

"Besides," said I, quoting the words of an old song, "'Love not! The thing you love may change.'"

Her colour heightened.

"A young man, singularly handsome, must have many admirers," I continued. "Among them you have heard, I believe, of Mrs. P., the rich widow, and the Hon. Miss C. Well, without adopting the conclusion that Victor is too much a lady's man ever to be the man of one lady, are you quite sure that his affection is strong enough to bear you up on the changeful tide of life?"

"If not, it will grow with our growth," answered Dora.

"Or," continued I, taking aim once more, "do you realise his vehemently impulsive temper, the fierce flash of that dark eye which demands implicit obedience. I must say that, knowing the disposition of each, I should tremble if there were even momentary collision. It would be like the meeting of two express engines with the steam full on—a catastrophe and wreckage. You must own that he is like a lion when crossed, and you have but one head."

"Ah, and but one heart; and that I have given wholly and unchangeably to him. I fear nothing—believe everything"—clasping her hands.

I could say no more, or it would have been "Bless you a thousand times!" so I had to leave Una and her lion alone. Not here did I capitulate. In the imposing presence of Victor, I hardly knew what to urge. I saw at once that I might as well attempt to turn the torrent of Niagara. He who from childhood had brooked no opposition would brook none now. He stood silently twirling his heavy moustache, as I ventured candidly but cautiously to state what duty had prompted me to urge against the match. During my description of his character, fixed by the fascination of his glittering eye, I fairly trembled, as I saw him bite his lips in restraining anger, and knew the strength of his massive arm, until the old gentle feeling came like sunlight over his face as I concluded:

"Well, my dear Victor, since you are both so decided, what can an old friend do but help you?"

Seeing that poverty was the only obstacle, Victor made up his mind at once to overcome it. For energy and enterprise such as his, Greater Britain alone could furnish scope. All was quickly arranged; a berth was secured in the splendid steamship *Sapphire*, and three days before she sailed for Australia, Dora and I waved our adieus at the Great Western Station. He was all animation and hope. He would breast the tide of adverse circumstance; he would come back

in three years laden with the spoils of commercial conquest; and then— Ah, well, how often have I seen a stately ship glide out of the harbour, buoyant with hope, laden with golden promises, and when the dark days came watched and waited for her return!

I must say that I should like to have seen a little emotion at parting. Never had Victor looked more handsome; Dora never more conscious of her power, or less inclined to "play the woman." Perhaps if I could have seen them an hour later, his face hidden behind the *Standard*, and she in the solitude of her room, I might have argued differently.

But there was one who felt the departure of Victor keenly. His only sister—the "princess," I always call her—was cast in the same imperious mould, and had the like commanding presence; and, need I say of a daughter of the proud Devonian family of B. she was exceeding fair. Delicate in health; threatened, indeed, at that time with a complaint which sometimes clothes its victims with ethereal beauty; there had always been close companionship between brother and sister.

I had to console her. Fancy a middle-aged bachelor, to whom a thing of beauty is still a joy for ever, whose sensitive nature renders him too susceptible of a fair girl just blossoming into womanhood; a fair girl in tears, too, confiding in an artless way her sudden sorrow, her hopes and fears as to the absent one. I had no fear about him; he will be sure to roughhew his way to the front; but I began to fear about myself, lest strong sympathy, which they say is akin to love, might carry me over the border.

I came away; but "parting is such sweet sorrow," I dare not analyse my feelings. I only knew that the sky overhead had a brighter blue, and sunshine, all too transient, prevailed within. I thought my heart had been buried long ago, like Pompeii, under cold grey ashes, and behold it proved "a self-surviving thing of power." When reality is dull, how pleasant is dreamland.

"Come again soon," said she; "I do so like to talk to you about Victor."

Thrice happy Victor, thought I; would I were half as young and handsome as he!

You should have seen the care with which I chose the finest rose in the market, the anxiety about that lovely spray of maidenhair, and the eagerness with which I presented the buttonhole to my princess.

As she sat dallying with the flower, her cough bringing the colour to her cheek, and her large eyes looking dreamily upon me, the fear stung me. Will she also pass to the land of shadows, and my life change to perpetual eclipse? I sought eagerly to divert her, a fund of anecdote and my keen sense of humour coming to the rescue, musing all the while whether she had any idea that "all the current of my being" set towards her.

Oh, no! Her very simplicity disconcerted me, her remarks showed the half-paternal estimation in which I was held.

"You are so good and kind; my dear father could not have been kinder!"

Then again, when I urged her to give me her photo, as a companion picture to that of Victor, how naïvely she replied:

"I must have it taken, because I shall never be younger, or look better, shall I?"

I think the very coyness and indifference of my princess, combined with occasional hauteur, spurred me onwards, onwards, I scarcely knew or cared whither.

Not that checks were wanting. My frequent visits excited notice and remarks.

"Well, if Uncle Fred really means to marry, why does he not marry some one of his own age?"

That's just what middle-aged gentlemen, bless them, seldom do. Years ago I exclaimed that, if I married, it would certainly be some girl young enough to be my daughter. Suitable age! think what that might mean to some folks—false hair, false teeth, false everything. Fancy fervent protestations shouted through an ear trumpet! Oh, no! as I pathetically wrote to my princess in an acrostic:

> "Ah, well for me that beauty grows not old,
> Fair faces still with fuller years unfold,
> Relume the past, and tinge the setting sun with gold."

And as the wheels of life drag heavily, and I scornfully measure the friendship, fashion, and frivolity of the world, how solemnly sweet is the remembrance that there is still an Eden guarded by angels of purity and innocence, where true love alone can enter.

I watched the princess with increasing solicitude, my own health being most frail, and at times one almost wished that if no happier union were attainable, she and I might glide, hand in hand, down the dark valley together, and pass behind the veil. Happily, however, the doctor's predictions and our own fears were not realised, for a change to her native air wrought wonders. Health and strength partly returned, and, as I walked with her by the sounding sea, more than once the lines of Montrose crossed the mind:

> "He either fears his fate too much,
> Or his desert is small,
> Who dares not put it to the touch,
> And win or lose it all!"

Yet the dream was so delicious—the idea so enchanting. Why should I risk an awakening? But I ventured delicately to ascertain whether the heart beating so near mine were quite free, and trembled till I heard:

"I am not engaged, and never have been."

I remembered her cousin's proposal—and discomfiture.

"The latest opportunity, I think, was Winstanley?"

"Yes; but I gave him no encouragement; in fact, I don't want to marry, unless any one will be my slave," said she laughing.

It was on my tongue to answer conclusively, but I thought it would be taking an unfair advantage.

Perhaps it was a little Quixotic on my part to call on Winstanley, and clearly to learn that I was not trespassing; a rival I could not be, with such a tall, fine-looking young fellow as he in the field.

Open as the day, he frankly confessed that he long looked upon his fair cousin "as his prize" in the matrimonial lottery, and was taken aback by her rejection; adding, "I can't make her out."

I was also puzzled. At times the princess was gracious, and invited confidence; then suddenly distant and haughty. All around must have noticed my devotion; could the object of it fail to perceive?

Months passed, and remembering that Victor was her guardian, I ventured with considerable apprehension to submit the case to him, and be influenced by his opinion. My fears pictured the lion's tempestuous wrath, or at least, merciless prohibition, and when, in two months the answer came, my breath shortened when I opened it.

It certainly was different from what I expected. In his large, legible hand, he described, page after page, his exploits in Australia; his success with a ranch, his numerous plans. I began to think my last letter had miscarried, when I spied an obscure postscript: "By the way, you must exercise your own judgment, as doubtless my sister will, without any direction from me."

Fool that I was to imagine that the idea which thrilled my whole being could really move another, even her brother. However, I had done the right thing, and received a kind of negative approbation, and when next I called, and the princess seemed in one of her happiest moods, I presented this ballad which I had written, and asked her to set it to music.

"O lady fair, can I declare,
One half my burning love for thee;
O lady fair, shall I despair
If thou should'st be unkind to me?

O love that leaves an aching heart,
And warps the mind with fancies chill;
We may not meet, we must not part;
For, lady fair, I love thee still.

And life would prove a dire eclipse,
And all my senses pall and fade,
Without the pressure of thy lips
And that bright sun those eyes have made.

O lady fair, can I declare,
For thee I yearn, I hope, I sigh;
O lady fair, shall I despair?
For thee I live, for thee would die!"

During the reading I watched her narrowly, anxiously. It seemed as if I had staked all on this last throw. Her beautiful face flushed, and a strange light shone in the dreamy eyes; and then sadness came like moonlight, and the cheeks were white, and her lips moved without sound. Half kneeling I murmured plaintively:

"Can you—will you forgive me?"

She composed herself; the calm, strong spirit of her family came to the front, as she replied, not unkindly:

"It is a pretty thing. I must practise an accompaniment. When will you call again?"

* * * * * *

Then I had not been spurned, repelled, rejected. I rushed along the streets with a kind of electric buoyancy, as if the days of my youth had run back to tell me that it is a happy world after all. I tried to leap over the great gulf fixed between me and my princess (that of disparity in age) by comparison.

There was Colonel F., nearly sixty—a long way ahead of me—married only last week to a lady of twenty. He settled £500 a year on her, and society immediately discovered it was an excellent match, for the orphan girl had not a penny. There was my neighbour S., a widower with three crawling children, and a stipend of £150, married the village belle thirty years his junior. Mrs. Grundy did not forbid the banns, only declared, "How could he throw himself away!" My venerable friend, Montagu Oxenden too, dipping into the lucky bag of matrimony within the shadow of seventy, and living happily ever afterwards.

He cut through the gossamer compliment of congratulation abruptly with:

"No doubt you think there's no fool like the old fool!"

"Far from it," I replied. "'It is never too late to mend.'" I thought also of Swift and Stella, of John Jarndyce and Dame Durden.

Yet why should I anticipate; the princess had said nothing; but ardent lovers, like certain other curious animals, can see in the dark. Yes, I was right. Like Cæsar, I came and overcame. Next day my princess received me with evident anxiety. She had learned my ballad, and

> "The low, the deep, the pleading tone,
> With which I sang another's love
> Interpreted my own."

The finest images are wrought in marble, and I found the object of my own agitation, calm and statuesque as Hebe. Even when I intreated with passionate energy, the large eyes looked down half in pity, half in wonder, and no trembling chords vibrated in that gentle heart.

She owned this, and said simply:

"I cannot respond as you would wish; indeed I never was capable

of strong emotion, or perhaps of deep feeling. If increasing regard is sufficient, then——"

* * * * * *

Then we were married. I wrote a long letter, oh, so full of the outpouring of one's heart, to the man most interested, Victor B., and received an immediate reply, containing particular directions as to the purchase of artificial bait for him in Regent Street, with three words of congratulation added in pencil. With trepidation I had previously announced that his lady love, believing perhaps that "death and distance differ but in name," wearied with hope deferred, and the persistent pleading of her mercenary parents, had married a parvenu. Victor's answer was like a bolt from the blue, scathing and blinding in its intensity of reproach and denunciation. The young gentleman need not have been so severe, for he had taken to himself a wife a fortnight before Miss L.'s bridal.

And now, after three years, we are at Plymouth—my darling princess in a wheel-chair, and I looking over the wide waters, waiting till our ship comes home, watching for the splendid sea-ploughing *Sapphire* and her eight hundred passengers, amongst whom none so tall, so handsome as he, the imperious Victor, who will lend fresh charm and brightness to our rooms to-night.

A PEASANT HEROINE.*

A LITTLE peasant maiden,
  Scarce thirteen summers old,
Yet in her veins there ran the blood
  Of saints and heroes bold,
And in the Book of Life her name
  Is writ in lines of gold.

'Twas in the dreary winter,
  When the snow lay thick and white,
Two children sat beside the hearth
  In the flickering firelight;
While round the lonely house the wind
  Went moaning through the night.

Two sturdy peasant children,
  Who kept their watch alone,
For the elders to the village
  A few miles off had gone—
Sedate, housewifely little Reine,
  And seven-year old Antoine.

* Founded on fact.

They sat and talked together
In happy childish glee,
The boy his curly head at rest
Against his sister's knee,
And Reine told stories while she plied
Her needles busily.

But hark! What sound comes up the wind,
From the great plain beneath?
The children startled to their feet,
And listening held their breath—
And then the two young faces turned
As pale, as pale as death!

"The wolves! It is the horrid wolves!"
Reine sprang towards the door,
With trembling hands she drew the bolt
More closely than before:
"Oh, Antoine, pile the logs up high,
And make them blaze yet more!"

With red glare on the gleaming snow,
Shone out the leaping flame,
But at the door the howling pack
With frantic clamour came—
They shook it with their savage claws—
It trembled in its frame!

The children clung together
In mortal agony,
There was no succour nigh at hand,
No place for them to fly—
A crazy plank between them stood,
And the death that they must die!

"Oh, dear Lord, save my brother!"
The elder sister prayed:
And then she started to her feet
And felt no more afraid;
For quick as light a sudden thought
Flashed on the little maid.

The press beside the fire!
If she could reach up there—
There was just room enough for *one*,
But not an inch to spare!
She seized her brother in her arms
And struggled on a chair.

Outside the beasts were clamouring
With howlings yet more wild,
Into the dark but safe recess,
She thrust the frightened child;
She turned the key and 'gainst the bars,
Some heavy logs she piled.

'Twas done! The deed of rescue—
  It scarce was safely o'er,
When with a groaning awful crash
  Fell down the rotten door—
The wolves rushed in! Did angels weep
  To see such suffering sore?

* * * * * *

At last the village is astir,
  The wolves are all at bay,
Forth from the little house they rushed
  And left their senseless prey;
While after them with gun and spear
  Men track their desperate way.

Across the blood-stained threshold
  The frantic parents go;
And then upon the frosty air
  Rings out a wail of woe—
As by the little mangled form,
  The awful truth they know.

They clasped their other darling,
  "But Reine, our Reine," they cried—
And then the little sobbing lad
  Tells how she made him hide,
And face to face with hideous death,
  Stood gallantly outside!

* * * * * *

Why linger o'er the story,
  So full of woe and pain?
At rest in the Good Shepherd's fold,
  Is valiant little Reine,
Where never cruel prowling wolf
  Can harm or fright again!

But still throughout the country,
  Her name is honoured long,
And the village people chant her praise
  In native rhyme and song,
And tell about the quenchless love
  That made her heart so strong.

A little peasant maiden,
  Yet she so well had striven,
That unto her a glorious crown,
  The martyr's crown, was given,
And a place among the deathless ranks
  Of God's dear saints in Heaven.

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

THE FIRST LODGER.

"IT seems the only thing we can do, Kate."

A sad-faced elderly woman, speaking in reluctant desponding tones, looked in the bright handsome face of a half-sister, who was young enough to have been her daughter.

"Quite so, Jane," answered a brisk, clear voice; "and nothing very terrible about it after all!"

"Oh, my dear, don't say that! But for this cruel loss your future might have been so different. But we must try to save our home."

"Don't trouble about my future, Jennie!" said Kate Walters, hastily. "I am five-and-twenty, and a sober woman of the world. Let us write the advertisement. Sit down."

And she playfully pulled Miss Walters into a chair beside her own at the table, and took up a pen which she dipped in the ink.

"Now then! what shall we say?"

"Two ladies having a larger house——"

"Oh, Jennie!" interrupted Kate, "don't you think the shabby-genteels have used up that little fib?"

"My dear, what would you say then?" hopelessly inquired Miss Walters.

"*I* should say, 'Two comfortably furnished rooms to let with good attendance; gentleman preferred.'"

"Why a gentleman, my child?" asked the elder, nervously.

"Because he will perhaps have something to take him out early and keep him out late," said Kate, promptly; "and ladies sit at home and ring the bell all day."

"True, my dear. Hadn't we better say it is a lady's house?"

"I think not; they wouldn't know we were real ladies, you know," explained Kate. "And those people who have seen 'better days' are always a nuisance; don't you remember when we lodged with the Norrises at Scarborough?"

"Yes, yes. Write what you please, my dear. It is all very terrible."

The advertisement was posted, and Kate put many dainty touches to the drawing-room, and bed-room at the back of it, which were to be let. One thing Miss Walters was firm about—*Kate* should never have anything to say to the lodger; she and the servant would manage that. At present the last-named treasure knew nothing of their plans.

Kate was out when a gentleman called.

"I wish to see the rooms," said a quick business voice.

The maid stared. A small crack of the dining-room door opened slowly, and Miss Walters whispered:

"Show the gentleman the drawing-room floor."

The tasteful rooms pleased the visitor.

"Might do; what's the rent?"

"I don't know, sir!" sulkily answered the servant, who was brooding over a grievance.

"Call the landlady, then!" sharply retorted the gentleman, leading the way down-stairs.

Miss Walters heard him, and received a fresh shock; but held open the dining-room door for the stranger, who entered, and looked steadily at the slight nervous little lady before him. She also regarded him, and beheld a man of about middle height, with a large brown beard, and an eye-glass which was evidently a necessary appendage, and a keen business air.

"May I ask the rent, everything included?" he inquired quickly.

"Two pounds a week, if you don't think it too much," said the lady, feeling and looking miserable.

"That will do. I can send in my traps to-night, and come to-morrow, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes."

"Your name?" inquired the gentleman, holding an open note-book in which to register it.

"Walters—Miss Walters."

And with a bow he was gone.

"Kate, my darling, the rooms are let!" was that young lady's greeting.

"Capital, Jennie! Who has taken them?"

"A gentleman, but"—and here Miss Walters gave a blank look of apology—"my dear, I quite forgot to ask his name!"

"You're a very indiscreet person, Jennie!" said the young lady with a look of astonishment.

However, about eight o'clock some very substantial luggage arrived in the shape of well-travelled portmanteaus and bags.

"That looks all right, Kate," deprecated Jane.

"Really you will make a first-rate screw of a landlady!" jeered Kate. "How do you know these things are not filled with infernal machines? I shall have a good look at our lodger to-morrow, and in the meantime will look at the labels to see what he calls himself."

Miss Walters followed the tall graceful figure nervously into the dimly-lit hall. Kate gave a little start as she read the first label, and was silent.

"Is anything wrong?" pleaded the elder sister, clasping her hands together.

"Oh, dear no!" said Kate, coolly. "Capel Drewitt, Esq., is a most harmless name," and she returned to the dining-room.

Then came the maid, with a tragic air of dignity.

"Can I speak to you, ma'am?"

"Of course," said Miss Walters a little testily, for it had been a trying day, and she could not see the bright side yet.

"Please, ma'am, I wish to leave to-morrow."

"What for?" asked Miss Walters, helplessly.

"Because, ma'am, I could never live where there was a lodger took! I've halways lived in private families."

"Pray go, then!" said Kate, drily.

"To-morrow, please, ma'am. I don't mind about my month's wages."

When she had left the room Miss Walters could not help having recourse to her pocket-handkerchief.

"It's—it's dreadful. Who is to let him in?"

"My dear Jennie," cried Kate, jumping up and throwing her arm round the frail little suffering gentlewoman; "don't bother your head to-night! Have your cocoa, and come to bed."

Next day the maid left early, and Kate prepared for work until the Registry Office provided them with another treasure.

"My dear," said Miss Walters nervously, standing at the top of the kitchen stairs and speaking to Kate who stood bare-armed and broom in hand down below, "it is opening the door I am thinking of. Don't you think I could *leave* it open——"

A peal of laughter from Kate interrupted.

"Oh, Jennie, Jennie! Down in Devonshire, now, it might do, but in London! At all events, put my umbrella out of the hall if——"

Here a brisk knock and ring nearly caused Miss Walters to fall headlong down the stairs, and she almost hoped, though she would certainly have refused, that Kate would offer to open the door. However, no such offer was made, and with trembling fingers the lady unfastened the door. There stood, not the lodger, but an old lady friend who had come to give a cheering word to the depressed owner of the house. There was a providence in this visit, for the lady was able to provide them with a servant, the sister of one of her own domestics, who was in her house at the moment.

"And she shall be here before that man comes," said the old visitor in a determined voice, as she marched briskly off.

Consequently Capel Drewitt, Esq. was ushered into possession of his rooms in most approved fashion, and when asked if "he pleased to want anything," his reply was such as to give a chance, on its being repeated, for a really genial smile from Miss Walters.

"He won't never want nothink, ma'am, but his boots and his breakfast."

"That is a very satisfactory lodger, Jennie," congratulated Kate, in a tone of dry amusement.

Miss Walters was doubly happy now Kate approved, and began making a list of breakfast delicacies.

"What time does he want his breakfast, Clara?" she inquired.

"Nine o'clock, please, ma'am. And will you have breakfast before that, please, ma'am?"

"Half-past eight; but I shall be down long before," said Kate,

intruding firmly on the conversation, "Miss Walters will breakfast in bed."

"But, my dear, *now*," feebly interposed the mistress of the house.

"Be quiet, Jennie!" said Kate; and she was quiet, with a sad little smile of comfort on her delicate little face.

Kate's piano—moved into the dining-room before the lodger came—was opened each night. She played as few people play, and sang touching old songs in a way that brought up tears and memories unbidden.

What tempted her to that song?

Miss Walters, busy with happy little calculations in tiny note-books, heard a tremendous stamp on the floor above, which shook the gas globes wildly, and caused the little lady to start from her chair. Kate twisted round on her music stool, and faced her alarmed elder sister, observing:

"What a noisy lodger!"

The drawing-room bell rang.

Clara's fleet footsteps were heard ascending. Overhead the lodger paced hastily, and when the servant entered to inquire his exact object in ringing the bell, he did not seem to be quite sure what he wanted.

"You rang, sir?" she civilly suggested.

"Rang? Yes, oh, yes. Have you such a thing as—as—as a lemon in the house?"

"I'll see, sir."

"Wait, Mary—what's-your-name? Who was that singing just now?"

"Why, Miss Walters' sister, sir."

"Oh, indeed!"

"I'll see about the lemon, sir," said Clara retiring.

"Hang the lemon!" muttered the lodger.

In the dining-room, the servant found her mistress expectant.

"Have you such a thing as a lemon, ma'am, Mr. Drewitt says."

"Does he stamp like that for a lemon?" murmured Kate.

"My dear!" gravely responded Miss Walters, seeing with disgust that Clara had raised her muslin apron to conceal a giggle. The lemon was provided from the sideboard, and there is reason to believe that it was either consumed whole that night, or thrown amongst the cats who made harmony towards morning.

"Good-night, dear Jennie!" said Kate, bending softly to kiss her sister after seeing her safely into bed.

"Good-night, my love," said the elder lady, looking anxiously in the beautiful grey eyes; "you are—I hope, my dear, you are quite well to-night?"

Kate laughed; her bright careless laugh.

"When was I ever ill, Jennie?"

"It is not that, child," said Miss Walters, with a smothered sigh;

"but you have borne much—your father's daughter should have had——"

"You have managed to spoil my father's daughter, Miss Walters," said Kate laughing, "and you are reaping the whirlwind of it."

"Dearest, noblest!" affectionately murmured the delicate little lady, and Kate looked sadly back as she said to herself outside the door:

"Poor Jennie! she thinks I care about the money! She knows nothing—shall never know!"

Kate's room was at the top of the house. It was late when she went up carrying no light, and she paused on the first landing to make sure the drawing-room gas was out. The door stood partly open and all was in darkness; only the stairs were flooded with bright moonlight, which showed her beautiful figure in full relief to a pair of eager puzzled eyes which were watching from the darkened room as she ascended.

Next day the lodger, his week having expired, asked Clara if he could see Miss Walters.

"I'll see, sir."

Miss Walters desired the servant to say she was disengaged in the dining-room. Kate immediately withdrew to the lower regions.

"My little account, Miss Walters," said Mr. Drewitt, entering with that document in his hand, and laying the amount on the table.

Miss Walters bowed, and expressed a feeble and embarrassed hope that Mr. Drewitt was comfortable, for a wild fear had seized her that he might be going to give notice and leave.

"Quite so! Oh, yes, perfectly!" replied the gentleman, with such an air of abstraction that his next remark had an additionally startling effect.

"I beg pardon—a thousand pardons, in fact," he said rapidly, fixing and letting fall his eyeglass several times; "but is your real name Walters?"

Good Heavens! this timid little lady to be suspected of an alias. What new humiliation was this? She drew herself up with great dignity, and said:

"It is, sir! What reason have you for supposing me to be any one else?"

"None! I must consent to appear like a lunatic." He was gone, and did not return till late that night. Next day he went out as usual, but returned about half-an-hour after, let himself in with a latch-key, and came face to face with Kate on the landing, she having a large dusting-apron on, and her splendid hair rolled in a white linen cloth.

There was an ottoman on which Kate angrily cast her turban and her gloves, and then stood downcast and scarlet beside them and before her judge.

"At last!" he exclaimed, seizing fiercely the trembling hands. "Why this false name?"

The honest grey eyes opened with indignation.

"I have no false name! You are my half-sister's lodger here. My mother was Mrs. Walters before she married my father."

"Well, why have you avoided me? You know you love me!"

"How dare you?" angrily began the girl, but something in the brave eyes that met hers broke her down, and she sobbed in his arms.

"Please, Miss Walters, ma'am!" cried the maid in awe-stricken whispers, entering her mistress's bed-room, "there's Miss Kate and the drawing-room floor going on like anythink on the landing!"

Out rushed Miss Walters in her dressing-gown, and straight to the scene of action.

"Sir, unhand my sister!" she cried.

"Oh, Jennie, Jennie!" half laughed, half cried Kate, who did not try to be "unhanded," "it's all my fault."

"A gentlewoman!" gasped Miss Walters, in pale dismay.

"It is all right, indeed it is, dear madam," said the lodger. "Do let us get into a room and explain."

Which they did, to the natural disappointment of the servant, who would have liked the explanation to take place on the stairs.

The truths which came to light were simple. Kate Kennedy, Jane Walters' young half-sister, had met Capel Drewitt five years before, and they had loved each other. He went to India to make a home before offering his hand; in the meantime Kate was left, to her surprise, a penniless orphan, and in the midst of her sorrow a rumour reached her, which remained uncontradicted, that Capel Drewitt had married in India. All this, and the production of certain returned letters, which Mr. Drewitt had in his possession, showing that he had written his proposals, and received back his letters owing to Kate's change of fortune and residence, made the horizon clear and promising at once.

"My darling, good child!" cried Miss Walters.

"You see, Jennie," said Kate, in a laughing whisper, "how wise I was to advertise for a gentleman!"

"There is a providence in all things—in the midst of our greatest troubles a special blessing comes," said Miss Walters.

"You mean 'our lodger,' Jennie, don't you?" suggested Kate demurely.

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

OUT OF THE ROOM, ALONG THE CORRIDOR, AND UPSTAIRS, SLOWLY, MECHANICALLY, AS A WOMAN IN A DREAM.

THE ARGOSY.

NOVEMBER, 1892.

A GUILTY SILENCE.

CHAPTER XLII.

EVE WARRINER.

WHEN twelve hours had passed after the posting of the two letters, Trix began to listen anxiously for the cab that was to bring Margaret from the station. Or, perhaps, one of them might first write—either her husband or her sister ; and every time she heard the postman in the street, her heart gave a little leap, and she tried to nerve herself in anticipation of the letter which she felt almost sure he must have for her. So the first day passed away, and the second day, and the third; but no cab stopped at Mrs. Clemson's door, neither did the postman leave any letter for the young wife lying upstairs with clasped hands and beating heart, and waiting, with a desperate patience on her white face, for the missive that was not yet written.

When the third day came to an end, and brought her no news, Trix said to herself, "They have renounced me. They have given me up, one and all. They will have nothing further to do with me. Well, if they can live without me, I must try whether I cannot live without them."

All that night she lay awake, crying softly to herself. But just as the first grey streaks of the winter morning were making themselves apparent in the sky, she fell into a quiet, dreamless sleep, as soft and refreshing as that of a child. She awoke about ten o'clock, to find Mrs. Clemson by her bedside, quietly stirring a cup of tea.

"Well, how are we this morning? A little better, unless I am much mistaken. Now, here's a nice cup of tea, just sweetened to your liking. Try to drink it ; it will do you good."

Trix sat up in bed, and put her arm round the old lady's neck, and drew her face close to her own, and kissed her.

"I will eat or drink anything you bring me," she said, "for I want to get well as soon as possible. And there is something else I want, and that is, to learn how to make artificial flowers. I want to earn my own living, be it ever such a poor one."

"If you want to learn how to make artificial flowers," said Mrs.

Clemson, "Eve shall give you some lessons—that is, when you are a good deal stronger than you are now. But as to earning your living by it, that is easier said than done. But it will be time enough to talk about this in another fortnight. What you have got to do now is just to eat and drink as much as you can, and not bother your head about anything."

Not bother her head about anything! Good homely advice, no doubt, if she could only have acted on it.

On the seventh day after sending off her first letter, a sudden fit of impatience came over her, and she wrote to her husband a second time, but in no yielding mood. She also began a second letter to her sister; but after writing half-a-dozen lines, she tore it up and thrust it into the fire.

"I had a sister Madge once, who loved me better than all the world beside," she said bitterly to herself. "Now, I have only Mrs. Bruhn, of Brook Lodge, for a sister, and that makes all the difference. Not till she has answered my first letter will I write to her again."

Her letter to her husband ran thus :—

"When I wrote to you a week ago, I informed you that my sister, Mrs. Bruhn, could furnish you with my address. As you have not thought well to communicate with me since that time, I can only conclude it to be your wish that henceforth we shall be as strangers to each other. I am quite content that such should be the case, since it would appear that you either cannot or will not give me such an explanation of your conduct as, in my position as your wife, I have a right to look for at your hands. It may be that your conduct admits of no explanation. Such is the only construction I can put upon your silence. In that view of the case, I ask only that we may never meet again. "And so—farewell.

"B. R."

This letter, as we have already seen, met with a like fate to the first one. It never reached the hands of Hugh Randolph, and Trix waited in vain for a reply.

In the breaking away of all the ties of her former life, and in the loneliness of heart to which she was now condemned, Trix felt herself drawn gradually closer to her new friend, Eve Warriner. Eve's sympathy was so unobtrusive, and yet so genuine—for Trix had given her an outline of her story—that the doctor's young wife must have been made of far sterner stuff than she was had she not felt touched and cheered by it. Without knowing anything of Eve's history, Trix felt instinctively that it must be a sad one; that her own sorrows had taught her to open her heart to the sorrows of others; and that between herself and the world's afflicted ones there was a subtle chord of sympathy which brought them into union one with the other, making her the confidant of the troubles of all with whom she came in contact. During the worst part of Trix's illness, Eve had

shared with Mrs. Clemson the task of nursing her ; and now that her strength was coming back from day to day, and the time of nursing had gone by, Eve still spent many hours in Trix's room, working busily at her flowers meanwhile, talking or silent, according to the mood in which the invalid might happen to be. That delicate assimilation of her own mood to that of others was, perhaps, one great reason why she was liked so well by all who knew her.

"What a good woman Mrs. Clemson must be!" said Trix one day to Eve after a long silent pause, during which she had been thinking deeply. "The goodness of her heart seems to shine out through every action of her life."

"She *is* a good woman," answered Eve emphatically, "as no one has better reasons than myself for knowing. Had it not been for her, I should have been lying at this moment in a nameless grave, the victim of my own rash act."

"You!" exclaimed Trix in astonishment.

"I," answered Eve calmly. Her nimble fingers ceased their movements for a minute or two. She sat in silence, gazing into vacancy. Then breaking up her reverie with a sigh, she turned a smiling face on Trix. "It does me good now and then to talk about myself," she said ; "it seems to relieve the fulness that I sometimes feel just here," and she pressed her hand to her heart ; "so I now propose to tell you the story of a naughty girl.

"My father was, and is, a country parson," began Eve, "and I am an only child. I lived a very happy life at the little parsonage till I was eighteen years old, and had not a care, a hope, or an ambition, beyond the moss-grown walls of its garden. We were not very rich, but we had enough for our simple wants, and something over for the poor. After a time, some one came and told me that he loved me, and I thought that I loved him in return ; but it was liking, not love, that I felt for him, as I afterwards discovered to my bitter cost. He pressed me to become his wife, and I consented. My father made no difficulty from the first. The wedding-day was fixed, and all arrangements made, when I went to spend the last fortnight of my unmarried life at the house of an aunt, who lived thirty miles away in another county. What followed is not difficult to guess. While at my aunt's, I met with a second some one whom I could and did love, and who professed to love me. Even at this distance of time I cannot bear to dwell on the details of the sweet, hateful story. It is enough to say that his promises made me forget everything else. We were quietly married one morning at a little church three miles away across the fields. He brought an elderly friend who gave me away, and who passed for my uncle. That night I left my aunt's house for ever, and joined my husband at the nearest railway station. I wrote to my father, I wrote to the man I had so cruelly jilted. I told both of them what I had done, and prayed their forgiveness.

"My husband and I went to a little town in the south of France

and then followed six happy, happy months. My husband was fond of me in his own careless indifferent fashion, and that was all I asked. He was one of the most changeable of mortals; and I suppose that, in time, his love for me would have burnt itself out, and my dream of happiness would have come to an end that way. The waking, however, came after a different fashion. He had gone away with a French friend for a few days' fishing. While he was from home, a letter from England came through the post to his address; it was marked *immediate and important*, and the words were underlined. I was utterly at a loss where to find my husband; he never made me the confidant of his movements whenever he went from home on any of his sporting excursions. Thinking that there might perhaps be something in the letter that I could reply to in his absence, and that, in any case, no harm could result, I opened it. It proved to be from my husband's man of business, informing him that the younger of his two children was dead, and that *his wife* being unacquainted with his address, had applied to him—the lawyer—to inform her husband of the fact. 'Her husband! then what is he to me, and what am I to him?' was the first question I asked myself. When Ralph came back, which he did next day, it was the first question I put to him. He took the whole matter very coolly, as he did everything in life.

"'You are rightly served,' he said, 'for opening a letter that did not belong to you.'

"I think the next half-hour was the bitterest of my life. I got the whole story from him by dint of questioning, for he would not tell me anything of his own accord. He had been married ten years when I first knew him, but had not lived with his wife for more than half that time. He was a man who would let nothing stand in the way of his own ends. Rather than lose me—his whim for the time being—he chose to commit bigamy. This he acknowledged with the utmost frankness, in answer to my questions, saying, 'If ever I return to England, dear child, you can have me arrested for bigamy, and take your revenge out of me that way.' But he knew very well that I should do nothing of the kind. Well, to shorten a long story, it will be sufficient to say, that on the evening of that same day I left him. Now that I knew my position in relation to him, I would not stay another hour. He tried, in his languid *far niente* way, to induce me not to leave him; but I have sometimes thought since that he was rather pleased than otherwise, to be so easily rid of a toy of which he had already begun to tire. Be that as it may, I found myself in London three days later, and in all the great city there was not a soul that I knew. By this time my money was nearly exhausted, but in my travelling case I found a purse containing twenty sovereigns, which Ralph had put there unknown to me. I went to a quiet and inexpensive hotel, and wrote to my father and my aunt; but my aunt had died while I was abroad, and my father refused to

even answer my letters. Other relatives in the world I had none. Again and again I wrote to my father, but all to no purpose. His stern sense of right and wrong would not allow him to pardon in one of his own kin what he would have been one of the first to condone in the case of a stranger. Week by week my little store of money dwindled to a smaller sum, but I was utterly apathetic in this and every other matter; utterly regardless as to what should become of me. At length the day came when I was called upon to change my last shilling. I shook hands with the landlady of the hotel, and bade her farewell, telling her that my two boxes would be sent for; then putting on my bonnet and shawl, I wandered out into the streets. It was in the spring of the year; the days were warm and dry, but the nights were still keen and frosty. What happened to me during the next four or five days I can scarcely remember. I walked about the streets all day, and passed my nights on a bench in one of the parks. I lived on bread and water while my few coppers lasted, but when my last penny was gone, water alone was all I had. This could not last long, so, on the evening of the second day that I had been without food, and when my hunger had become almost unbearable, instead of going to the park, I made my way down towards the river. After a time I found myself crouched in a dim corner near one of the bridges, but have no recollection of how I got there. My fixed determination was to end everything that night by a leap into the cold, dark flood, in whose swirl and lap and wash there was a whisper of oblivion—a murmur of the sleep that knows no waking.

"By-and-by, when one of the great clocks near at hand had told eleven, and one by one the busy noises of the day were dying out, I crawled cut of my lair, and making my way up one or two narrow deserted streets, I found myself in a little while on the bridge itself. The leap from its parapet, so I calculated, would deaden sensation before I should touch the water, and make death easier. I began to pace the bridge, thinking of my past life as I did so; but it was chiefly the old time at home, when I was a careless happy girl, that my thoughts ran on, and of the stern grey-haired man living out his lonely life at the little parsonage among the hills. Had all the world been mine at that moment, I would gladly have given it for one kiss from his lips and one word of forgiveness. At length the half-hour was chimed by the same clock that I had heard before. 'One short fifteen minutes more, and then I shall cease to suffer,' I said to myself. 'When the quarter before midnight chimes, I will hesitate no longer.'

"As it seemed to me, the words had hardly gone from my lips, when the slow musical chimes broke the quiet of the great bridge yet once again, and I felt that my time had come. I looked around. The night was very dark, and the far-apart lamps seemed to struggle ineffectually against the blackness. For the moment I seemed to be utterly alone. No sound of approaching footsteps broke the stillness.

I took off my bonnet and laid it on the parapet; I bound up my hair, and tied my shawl firmly round my waist. My foot was on the topmost ledge, and in another second I should have been over, when I felt my gown clutched at from behind, and a woman's voice said, 'What are you doing here at this time of night? Come down, or I will call the police.' I stepped down on to the pavement, and tried to free myself from her grasp, but she held me fast. 'Let me go,' I said. 'You mind your business, and leave me to mind mine.'—'This is my business, or at least I shall make it so,' said the woman firmly. 'Come quietly with me, or I shall put you into the hands of the police.' She placed my hand within her arm, and drew me off the bridge. 'Rash girl! Do you know what it is that you were about to do?' she said when we had got into the streets. 'Yes, I was about to put an end to my troubles,' I said sulkily; 'and but for you they would have been all over by this time.'—Your earthly troubles would have been over; but the trouble that never endeth, the trouble that lasts through eternity, might perhaps have begun. Where is your home, and who are your parents?'—'I have neither,' I answered.—'For to-night you shall go with me to my home. In the morning we will talk over your affairs, and see what had best be done for you.' She brought me home to this house, and here I have been ever since."

There were tears in Trix's eyes as Eve Warriner finished her narrative.

"*My* troubles seem heavy to bear," she said; "but how much heavier must yours have been! How long have you lived with Mrs. Clemson?"

"Nearly two years, and during that time I have 'healed me of my wounds.' The scars remain, and always will do, but the old bitter smart has died out, and again it seems a pleasant thing to live."

"But still your life must be a very lonely one," urged Trix. "You are so superior in every way to those——"

Eve held up her hand.

"Don't talk in that strain, please," she said. "In what way are either you or I superior to Mrs. Clemson? We may be more highly educated, our intellectual needs may be greater; but her noble heart, so full of true Christian charity, redeems—nay, far more than redeems—every other deficiency."

"I am rightly rebuked," said Trix. "Mrs. Clemson has a heart of gold. Such as she make the salt of the earth."

"Your occasion for saying so would be still greater if you knew as much as I know of her private life, and of the good she does by stealth."

"And have you quite forgotten the past?" asked Trix. "Does it never rise unbidden in your memory like a ghost?"

"Often and often," answered Eve. "No, the past will not let itself be forgotten. It comes like an importunate beggar knocking at the gates of

Memory. But I will not give way to it more than I can possibly help. I find that the best remedy for keeping my thoughts from wandering far afield is to keep my fingers well employed."

"Your remedy shall be mine," said Trix, "as soon as ever I shall have gained a little more strength."

"This has been a happy month for me," said Eve smilingly. "It has given me a friend"—here she bent over, and kissed Trix fondly; "and it has given me back the love of my father."

"Your father! Have you seen him?" said Trix eagerly.

"I have," answered Eve. "I was down at home—at the dear old parsonage—when you first came here. Yes, my father has forgiven me; and the full meaning of the words can be known to those alone who have sinned as I have sinned. I know that his love has been mine from the first, that his heart has never been estranged from me; and now I feel that not contentment merely, but happiness, may again be mine."

"Your words are like medicine to my soul," said Trix. "I feel that even in my case there may be hope."

"Hope on, hope ever," answered Eve earnestly. "Let that be your motto. I can see the truth of it now, although there was a time when such words would have seemed to me like so many unmeaning sounds. But I have not yet told you to what especial means I owe my reconciliation with my father. I owe it to the kind offices of the man to whom I was once engaged to be married—of him whom I so cruelly jilted. By some means it came to his knowledge that I had left my husband. Once, when I was at my wretchedest, he saw me in the middle of a London crowd; but before he could reach me I had disappeared. I saw him, and fled from him as though he were one who had sworn to take my life. But he would not lose me thus easily. He could not look for me himself, but he paid others to do so for him,—men accustomed to such tasks. I was found at last, and he (I will not mention his name) came to see me. He was not long in discovering that the great unhappiness of my life arose from my father's refusal to be reconciled to me. He undertook to bring us together again, and he succeeded. The utmost concession that he could induce papa to make was granting me permission to write to him. But he was not satisfied with that. He took me down to the parsonage, and opening the door of the room in which papa was sitting alone, busy with his next Sunday's sermon, he pushed me in, and shut us up together. It was a bold *ruse*, but it was a successful one. Poor papa capitulated, and in two minutes was calling me by the old pet name that I knew myself by before I knew that I had any other."

"And yet you never really loved this true-hearted man?" said Trix.

"No, I never really loved him," answered Eve, "except as I might love a brother, or a very dear friend. And he—well, I have good reason to know that he has long got over his youthful passion for me,

and is happy in other ties. To me he has been true-hearted in the noblest sense of the word, returning good for evil, and winning back a father's love when I thought I had lost it for ever. A good and noble man in every way is Hugh Randolph."

"Who?" gasped Trix, while a death-like pallor overspread her face. "I did not hear the name aright."

"Hugh Randolph is the name. I did not intend to mention it even to you, but it slipped off my tongue before I was aware. By profession he is a surgeon, and lives at Helsingham, a little town over a hundred miles from here."

"Then you are the veiled woman whom I saw him with at King's Cross a month ago. He and you went away together by train."

"We did. It will be just a month ago to-morrow since he took me back to my father. But how strangely you look at me! What do you know of Dr. Randolph? Are you a relative of his?"

"Only his wife," murmured Trix almost inaudibly.

CHAPTER XLIII.

FOUND.

To Hugh Randolph in his deserted home one dreary day passed after another without bringing him any tidings of his missing wife. Both for him and to Mrs. Bruhn this was a period of utter wretchedness. The inactivity to which they were condemned, the waiting for tidings that never came, lent an additional pang to what they might otherwise have felt. A day never passed without either Hugh walking up to Brook Lodge, or Margaret going down to the doctor's house. Mr. Bruhn was full of the warmest and most generous sympathy, and placed himself and his purse unreservedly at Hugh's command. Had assistance, either personal or pecuniary, been of any avail in the matter, Mr. Bruhn would have shrunk from no sacrifice however great.

There was another member of the family, Mr. Davenant, to wit. On the first evening after hearing of the disappearance of Trix, he broke down suddenly while playing in the overture to the burlesque, and was obliged to leave the theatre. Next day, he sent in his resignation, and at the end of the week he set out for Helsingham, where he was cordially welcomed by Mr. Bruhn. Under other circumstances, to have been so welcomed, and in such a house, would have made the old rover happy for ever; but his youngest daughter was gone, no one knew whither, and he had never felt till now how closely the fibres of his heart had twined themselves around her. He derived very little pleasure from his new clothes, or even from the choice cigars of which he was now at liberty to smoke as many as he pleased. Day by day he seemed to grow more silent and melancholy, and went mooning about the little town, heedless of everything and everybody;

haunting the telegraph office hour after hour, being possessed by a vague half-formed idea that it must of necessity be the place to which some tidings of his lost darling must first come.

The scheme devised by Charlotte Herne for rendering the breach between Hugh Randolph and his wife an irreparable one, had, so far, proved entirely successful. The only two letters written by Trix had passed into her hands and been destroyed, and any others that might be sent would probably meet with a similar fate. If Trix relied on letter-writing alone as a means of bringing about a reconciliation with her husband, the foundation on which she built her hopes was a poor one indeed. In any case, she, Charlotte, was determined to keep the two apart so long as it lay in her power to do so. The chapter of accidents might, perhaps, end in favour of her scheme. Events might so fall out as to preclude her hated rival from ever again seeking the shelter of her husband's roof. Every day that Trix remained away was one more point added in Charlotte's favour, and lessened the chance of the difference between husband and wife ever working itself out to a happy ending.

Charlotte found that she had little power over Hugh, as in the old time before his marriage, to charm away his melancholy, or lighten the evening hours when he came home, tired and dull, after a hard day's work. He was wounded too deeply for any simple touch of hers to be of avail. Still, her unspoken sympathy with him in his trouble, showing itself as it did in many different ways, was not without its effect upon his mind, although he himself might be hardly conscious of it. "Any news to-day, Hugh?" she would ask of him every evening when he came home.

"None whatever, Charlotte," he would answer, well knowing what she meant. As he spoke he could see the little hopeful smile with which she had awaited his answer fade off her face. She would sigh gently, her beautiful eyes would dim with tears, and a soft cloud of melancholy would settle round her; and Hugh would feel himself drawn nearer to her than he had ever been in his life before. Then, her deft, noiseless way of going about her household duties, which, now that Trix was no longer here, she had resumed, and even the low, monotonous tones of her voice, had a soothing effect upon his overstrained nerves.

But Hugh's misery was not to last for ever. It came to a sudden ending, and in this wise. One morning, several days after Charlotte's adventure in the garden, he was much later than usual at breakfast, having been called away from home at an early hour. When he entered the room, Charlotte was not there, having been specially sent for half an hour ago by Mrs. Sutton. But his letters were there, and he pounced on them at once; for, notwithstanding the time that had passed since Trix's leaving home, he was not able to rid himself of the hope that she would some day write to him. His letters this morning had been duly examined by Tib, and passed without

suspicion. Tib declared, and truly, that there was no letter addressed in the peculiar hand which she had been taught to detect and pick out; but there was one in another hand—a letter from Eve Warriner —that at once scattered Charlotte's edifice to the winds.

Hugh recognised the writing in a moment, but he put the letter on one side for a time, and did not open it till he had nearly finished breakfast, and then only with that amount of languid interest, which was all that he now seemed to have at command, even for matters that had at one time appeared to him of the greatest moment. But when his eye took in the contents of the note, he felt as if his senses had suddenly deserted him. The note ran thus :—

"Dear Mr. Randolph,—Your wife is here, under this roof, and has been here since the evening when you and I went down to Etwold together. I did not discover the identity of Mrs. Randolph with your wife till a few minutes ago, so could not write earlier. She has been very ill, but is better now. She has been the victim of a most unfortunate error; but it will be impossible for you to judge her otherwise than lovingly when you shall have heard all particulars. Come without a moment's delay. Mrs. Randolph herself has written to you twice, but, as you have not in any way noticed her letters, she lives in dread of she knows not what. Again I say, Come!

"Yours,

"Eve W."

"Thank Heaven! I have found her at last!" exclaimed Hugh, when he had read the letter a second time, and had made sure that his eyes were not deceiving him. And then, strong man though he was, a mist of tears dimmed his eyes for a little while, and all his heart was melted within him. "Eve says that my darling wrote twice, but no letter from her has ever been received by me. That will be a matter to inquire into when I come back." He looked at his watch, and found that he had just a couple of hours to spare before the departure of the next London train. His first act was to write and send a line to Mrs. Bruhn, telling her whither he was about to go, and on what errand. Then he hurried round to a few of his most important patients, and arranged with the same good friend that had acted for him previously to look after the remainder during his absence. Then back home, where he hastily packed a small travelling valise, by which time it was necessary to set out for the station. As he was going down the steps, he bethought himself of Charlotte. Turning for a moment to the servant, he said, "Tell Miss Charlotte, when she comes in, that I have had good news, and am off to London. Tell her also that I hope to be back sometime to-morrow, but not alone." Then he went.

Charlotte came back in about an hour, and Hugh's message was at once repeated to her word for word. The blind girl's face blanched to a still more deathly whiteness as her ears drank in the message,

while an expression of such fiendish malignity cramped her features for a moment, as caused the girl who had been speaking to her to shrink from her side as though she had caught a glimpse of some foul and hideous witch. Charlotte shivered from head to foot, then drew herself up proudly, and went slowly upstairs to her own room.

Hugh had many strange questions to ponder in his mind as he was borne swiftly Londonwards. But, ponder them as he might, no solution of them was possible to him till the end of his journey should be reached. Could he have had his own way, he would have transformed the sorry hack, behind which he was driven through the London streets, into a winged Pegasus that should have borne him swiftly through the air to the spot where his loved one was awaiting him.

Yes, she was awaiting him with a heart that beat as high and anxiously as his own. She heard the cab stop, she heard the door opened, she heard his footstep on the stairs, and next moment they were clasped heart to heart, and all the wretched time just ended seemed like an evil dream that is only remembered to be smiled at in the bright gladness of morning.

"Why did you not trust me, dear?" whispered Trix to her husband, as they sat together hand in hand, she with her head resting on his shoulder, in the grey twilight of the winter afternoon. "If you had only confided in me, all this misery would have been saved to both of us."

"It would," answered Hugh contritely. And then he kissed his wife again, by way of showing how penitent he was. "I was mad—wrong—foolish. I wished you never to know that you were not my first love—that I had ever cared for another than yourself. I had a ridiculous idea in my head—how ridiculous I now for the first time really see—that if you should ever learn that I had promised myself in marriage long before I knew you; that I had whispered words of love in other ears, as I have since whispered them in yours—I should stand less high in your regards, and that you would set less value on my affection should you ever learn that it was a second-hand article that had at one time been the property of some one else."

"You foolish old Hugh! How little you knew me!"

"I measured you after my own standard. I felt that it would be painful to me to know that you had ever loved before; and, reversing the case, I feared the effect of such knowledge on yourself. I wanted your heart to be so entirely my own, that I would not willingly allow the faintest shadow of any possible estrangement to come between us. We shall know each other better for the future," said Hugh.

"Yes, in that we shall be gainers by our lesson. Come what may, I can never, never doubt you again, dear. Eve Warriner has told me her story. She has told me of your untiring efforts to seek her out, and how, when you had found her, you could not rest content till you had brought about a reconciliation between her and her father. All the hardness, all the bitterness that was turning my heart to gall

melted away for ever when she accidentally let slip the name of the man who had not merely forgiven her the great wrong she had done him, but had covered his forgiveness with an action so beautiful. But why did you not answer my letters? I wrote to you twice, but when there came no reply, not even a line to say that you would never forgive me, nor receive me back as your wife, then I felt that I was indeed forgotten, and should have been glad to die, and trouble no one any more."

"No letter from you ever reached me," answered Hugh. "On that point you may rest assured, otherwise you would have seen me here long ago. It almost seems to me as if some treachery has been at work, trying to keep us asunder. But that must be a matter for after inquiry."

Trix then went on to tell her husband by what strange accident it fell out she had come to be an inmate of Mrs. Clemson's house. How Mrs. Clemson, having gone to the station to see Eve Warriner and Dr. Randolph off by train on their way to Etwold, had found Dr. Randolph's wife in a fainting fit, and had brought her home without knowing who she was. Then she went on to tell Hugh of her illness, and how she had been nursed and tended by Mrs. Clemson and Eve as though she had been a dear relative of both.

"God bless them for it!" said Hugh fervently, as Trix laid a happy, tearful face on her husband's breast. "Such actions seem to bring heaven nearer to earth, and make this world a brighter place to live in."

Mrs. Clemson's pleasant little parlour had never held four happier people than it held that evening. They sat up till the small hours of the morning, for they had a thousand things to say, and they all seemed as if they had known each other for fifty years. At noon next day, Dr. Randolph and his wife set out for Helsingham. Before their departure, Hugh settled the pecuniary part of his obligation to Mrs. Clemson, but the debt of gratitude that was owing to her he felt could never be repaid. His friendship was hers through life; and he did not leave till he had wrung from the old lady a promise to visit himself and his wife at Helsingham in the course of the coming spring.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE GREEN BOTTLE ON THE TOP SHELF.

Dr. Randolph had telegraphed the time of his arrival, and Mr. and Mrs. Bruhn and Mr. Davenant were all on the platform of the Helsingham station when he and Trix alighted from the train. That the meeting was a very happy one need hardly be said. Mr. Bruhn's carriage was in waiting, and they were all driven to Brook Lodge, where they found Mrs. Sutton and Miss Easterbrook awaiting their

arrival. Charlotte Herne had also been invited, but had pleaded illness as an excuse for staying at home. Both to Mrs. Sutton and Miss Easterbrook the fact that Trix had left her home for some unexplained reason was well known; and not only to them, but to Mr. and Mrs. Bruhn and Mr. Davenant a full explanation was due of what still seemed so unaccountable. That explanation was given by Hugh Randolph immediately on the arrival of the party at Brook Lodge. He would have taken the blame of what had happened entirely on his own shoulders, if Trix would have allowed him to do so. But when he had made his statement, she made hers, and left her hearers to apportion the censure as they might think best. Into those explanations it is not needful that we should enter here. What the tenor of them would be, the reader will readily surmise. Fortunately, the fact that Mrs. Randolph had left home without the knowledge or consent of her husband had been carefully concealed from even the servants of her own house. Hugh's flurried inquiries for her when he first missed her on his return from Etwold might possibly have raised some suspicion in their minds as to the real facts of the case; but it came afterwards to be understood among the household that Mrs. Randolph had been suddenly called away to attend on a sick relative, and although there might be room for surmise, there was none for downright scandal.

Thus it fell out that, beyond the little party assembled that evening at Brook Lodge, there were only two people in all Helsingham who really knew that Mrs. Randolph had run away from home. One of those two was Charlotte Herne, and she might be thoroughly trusted, as being one of the family. The other was Mr. Dawkins, the superintendent of police, and in his memory the knowledge of Trix's little escapade would be locked up, as in a strong box impenetrable to every one but himself.

A pleasant little dinner, and a pleasant evening afterwards; an early break-up, for Trix was still far from strong; and then Mr. and Mrs. Randolph were driven home in Mr. Bruhn's brougham.

"I am sorry Charlotte was not at Brook Lodge this evening," said Hugh to Trix as they were going along. "She sent word that she was unwell; but that was probably a mere excuse to avoid going into company. You know as well as I do what a strange, shy creature she is. I must ascertain at once on reaching home whether there is anything really the matter with her."

Charlotte Herne's presence in the house was the only shadow that lay upon Trix's heart as she came back home with her husband. It was a shadow that lay dark and chill, a shadow that the sunshine of her husband's love could dispel only for a time. The moment she was out of his presence, it was there again, brooding over her like a dark-winged bird from which there was no escape. She had escaped it for a time by being away; but to-night she felt the old influence creeping over her again, and chilling her to the heart as she drew

near home; and when Hugh spoke to her about Charlotte, she had no words in which to answer him.

Hugh had sent a message from the station, so that the arrival of himself and Mrs. Randolph was not unexpected at home. While Trix was upstairs taking off her things, he rang for the parlour-maid.

That matter of the missing letters lay heavily on his mind, and he could not rest till he had done his best to fathom it.

"Whose duty has it been of late," he asked the girl, "to take the post letters out of the box every morning, and lay them on the table ready for me?"

"Since Mrs. Randolph went away, the box has always been opened by Tib, and the letters taken by her to Miss Charlotte."

"That was done by Miss Charlotte's instructions, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"If Tib is in Miss Charlotte's room, tell her that I want to speak to her. If she has gone home, let her be sent for without delay."

"I never liked having that girl about the house," soliloquised Hugh, while Tib was being sent for. "There is something of the slyness and cunning of a bad old woman about her; and had not Charlotte's partiality for her been so evident, I should have sent her packing long ago."

Tib came panting in a few minutes later, having evidently run all the way from home. She stood in great awe of Dr. Randolph, having an instinctive notion that she was by no means a favourite with him. Hugh's first question told her what she most dreaded to hear, that the stern young doctor had a suspicion that his letters had been tampered with. To do Tib justice, she did all that lay in her power to screen both her mistress and herself, and would probably have been quite willing to take the entire blame on to her own shoulders, had there been any possibility of keeping Charlotte out of the transaction. But Hugh's cross-examination was too searching to allow of her escaping without telling the entire truth. Little by little, the facts of the case, as already known to the reader, were elicited from her reluctant lips. Tib's knowledge of the matter ended with the verification of the two letters addressed in that particular handwriting which she had been told by Charlotte to identify. For what reason Charlotte wanted those two particular letters picking out from the rest, and whether, after being so identified, they were handed over by her to Hugh, or were kept back for some purpose of her own, were points on which Tib was in utter ignorance.

"You say that Miss Charlotte showed you a certain envelope addressed to me," said Hugh; "and that the two letters afterwards pointed out by you were in a similar writing. Where is that envelope?"

"Locked up in a drawer in Miss Charlotte's room," answered Tib.

"If I were to show you another envelope in the same writing, do you think that you could recognise it?"

"Yes, sir; I am sure I could," answered Tib readily, who, now that the worst had been wrung from her, determined to make her case as good as possible by sticking to the truth in minor details.

Hugh opened his writing-desk, and taking out of it a dozen envelopes addressed to him by different people, only one of which was in Trix's writing, he spread the lot before Tib, and told her to look at them and tell him whether any of them were in a writing similar to that of the two letters identified by her for Charlotte. Tib ran her eye over the envelopes, and, without a moment's hesitation, picked out the one written by Trix.

"This one," she said, "is the same as the two letters, and as the envelope locked up in Miss Charlotte's drawer."

There was nothing more to be got out of Tib. With a severe reprimand, and a caution not to speak to any one of what had just passed between them, Hugh dismissed the girl till morning. His next duty, and it was a painful one, was to see Charlotte, and demand from her such an explanation as seemed to him necessitated by the circumstances of the case. During the past half-hour, an abyss seemed to have opened at his feet, into which he was afraid to look. To a man of a frank, honourable, and unsuspicious nature, such as was Hugh Randolph, life can have few bitterer discoveries than that of domestic treachery, of systematic deceit, on the part of those we love and hold in supremest confidence. The foundations on which the soul has reared its earthly dwelling are shaken, and all around us the ground trembles under our feet.

But infirmity of purpose was not one of Hugh Randolph's weaknesses. A few minutes given to deep and painful thought, and then he went upstairs in search of Charlotte, who had not been seen by any one out of her own rooms since the forenoon of the previous day.

She had understood but too clearly the message left her by Hugh. She knew that, in spite of all her patient scheming, her house of cards had tumbled to the ground, and that it could never again be rebuilt by her. By what means Hugh had discovered the whereabouts of his lost wife, she was utterly at a loss to imagine. She sent for Tib, and questioned her as to the possibility of any letter in that particular writing which she had been told to pick out having passed her that morning without detection. But Tib stoutly denied that such could have been the case, and Charlotte was thrown back upon the merest conjecture as to how Hugh could have come by his information. The question was, how much or how little did he know? Did he know anything of the missing letters, and of Charlotte's share in that nefarious piece of work? He could hardly have known anything of it when he left home, or he would not have left her a message that he had heard good news. But what might he not learn while he was away? In any case, she had no remedy but to await his return with what patience was possible to her. She would not have long to wait. The best and the worst would soon be known to her. Her hated

rival was coming back—so much she knew already from the message sent her from Brook Lodge—coming back to be reinstated in all the rights and honours due to her position as the wife of Hugh Randolph; while she, Charlotte, would sink again into the mere nonentity that she had been between the date of Trix's marriage and that of her leaving home. Charlotte's heart was very bitter within her as she thought of these things, and she awaited the coming of Hugh with a sort of dogged patience, eager and yet dreading to know the result of his journey to London.

At length she heard his footsteps coming up the higher flight of stairs that led to her room, and her heart began to beat tumultuously.

"Are you here, Charlotte?" he asked, as he opened the door, for the room was unlighted.

"Yes, Hugh, I am here," she answered plaintively, out of the darkness.

"I have something to say to you, Charlotte. But ring for lights, please. The place is as dark as a tomb."

"Darkness and light are both as one to poor me," she answered as she rang the bell.

She knew at once, from the cold constrained tones of Hugh's voice, that he was displeased with her about something. What that something was she needed no prophet to tell her, and she nerved her soul for the coming encounter. Presently a lighted lamp was brought in; then the door was shut, and they were left to themselves.

"Charlotte," began Hugh, in a voice that was very grave, and not untouched with sadness, "you and I have lived under the same roof for a long time; we have been as brother and sister to each other for many years. One of the dearest objects of my life has been to soften, as far as in me lay, the terrible affliction under which you are a sufferer; while, on the other hand, I have always had the most implicit faith in you, and would have trusted my reputation, my honour, my life itself into your care, feeling confident that you would have guarded them as religiously as if they had been your own."

"And your confidence would have been fully justified by the event," answered Charlotte, with bitter pride.

"To-night, however, I have heard something that has shattered my faith in you for ever," went on Hugh, without heeding the interruption. "Unless—unless, indeed, there are some facts still in the background with which I have not been made acquainted, and which, when brought forward by you, will throw an altogether different light on a transaction which, as it stands at present, certainly demands some explanation at your hands. Before I go on any further, however, let me earnestly entreat that you will answer the few questions I shall have to put to you truthfully and without prevarication. If you have done me any wrong, own to it at once. Do not let me have the added ignominy of knowing that you are trying to shelter yourself under a lie."

"Your words are very severe, Cousin Hugh," said Charlotte mournfully; "but ask me what you will. I swear to tell you nothing but the truth."

"That is all I ask," said Hugh. He sat silently for a few moments, playing absently with his watchguard, as if at a loss how to begin what he wanted to say. The lamp was between them, and Charlotte sat opposite to him, except for her breathing, as motionless as a statue, and almost as pale. Her beautiful intense eyes were fixed on vacancy: in that dazzling light she was as one stone-blind, seeing nothing, unless it was some inner vision of things known to herself alone.

"During the time my wife was from home," began Hugh at last, "all post letters that came to my address passed through your hands before they were allowed to reach me?"

"They did."

"The girl Tib was instructed by you to take all letters out of the box immediately after they had been left by the postman, and give them at once into your hands?"

"She was."

"She was further instructed by you to examine the directions of each batch of letters, and pick out any that might be written in one particular hand which she had been taught to detect?"

"She was."

"You have in your possession an envelope addressed to me. The letters which the girl was instructed to pick out were those which she judged to be in the same writing as that of the envelope?"

"They were."

"By whom was the address on that envelope written?"

"By your wife."

"How many letters were pointed out to you by the girl as being written by the same person as the envelope was addressed by?"

"Two."

"What became of those letters?"

"I burnt them."

"You read them, or, rather, caused them to be read to you, and then burnt them?"

"They were burnt without being opened. Not a single word of their contents became known to me."

"But what possible motive could you have for such an extraordinary course of action?"

"I had my private reasons."

"No doubt. But be good enough to explain to me what those reasons were."

"Your wife had left her home—left it without your knowledge—had gone you knew not whither. I was wishful that she should not come back. I wanted to break the link of communication between you and her. I wanted her to be lost to you for ever."

"But why did you wish that my wife should be lost to me for ever?"

"Because I hate her."

"You—hate—my—wife!"

"I—hate—your—wife. I have hated her from the moment I first heard her name. I shall hate her to the last moment of my life!"

"You must be a fiend in human shape! What have I done to deserve this at your hands?"

"What have you done, Cousin Hugh? Ah, me! You have been like the dearest and best of brothers. For your sake I would go through fire and water; I would give my life to save you from injury."

"And yet you have done your best to work me an irreparable injury—one that would have wrecked my happiness for life."

"It may seem so to you now," said Charlotte, with a bitter smile. "Time will teach you to think differently. In years to come, you will find that it is not within the power of any pretty face either to make or mar your happiness."

"You must allow me to be the best judge of my own happiness. That is a question which I am not disposed to argue either with you or any one else. All that I can deal with in the present case is the simple fact that, for some reason best known to yourself, you dislike my wife—'hate her' was the term used by you—and that, in pursuance of the ill-feeling with which you regard her, you have done your best to turn an accidental separation into a permanent one, and to drive her from her home for ever. A strange mode, truly, of showing your regard for me! I will not press you further for your reasons for what you have done. I don't care to know them. To analyse the motives that could have tempted you to an action so detestable, would be sorry work for any one; at all events, it is a task upon which I do not care to enter. One thing is very certain—that you must quit this roof at once. I need not dilate on what will probably seem to you a very minor matter—that you have utterly forfeited my affection and esteem, for I do not suppose that they were ever of much value to you. This is the last time that I shall trouble you with my presence. Early in the morning I will make arrangements with Mrs. Sutton to receive you temporarily. As to what your future movements may be, when once you shall have quitted this house, that is no concern nor interest of mine. In a few hours you and I will have done with each other for ever."

He rose and moved towards the door. Charlotte was still sitting, white and motionless, with a face like that of some fair young sorceress who had just heard her doom.

At the door Hugh turned. "Understand me," he said in slow, concentrated tones. "To-morrow morning you quit this house for ever."

"Fear not; I shall be ready," she answered. Then Hugh went out, and shut the door after him.

"His heart is as hard as a nether millstone," she murmured as the

noise of his footsteps died away downstairs. And then she fell to the ground in a fit.

She came to her senses slowly and painfully. But as she called to mind all that had happened to her within the last few hours, and remembered that to-morrow she must seek another home, she almost wished that she had never come back to life. The weather was very bleak, and she rose from the floor shivering with cold. She bathed her hands and face, and bound up her hair, and wrapped a warm shawl round her shoulders. The glare of the lamp dazzled her sensitive orbs, so she turned it out.

There was upon her a sense of utter loneliness and desolation such as she had never felt since the first few hours after her mother's death, and before the friends which that misfortune brought round her—her cousin Hugh among the rest—had proved to her that sympathy and love might still be hers, although her best friend was gone for ever. And now the same sense of being alone in the world was upon her again, only in a more intense degree, and with a hopelessness of change that made her very soul grow chill within her.

"I feel as if I were the only flesh-and-blood creature left alive," she muttered half-aloud, "and that besides myself the world held nothing but ghosts. Oh, Hugh! Hugh! you are not worthy of being loved as I would have loved you—as I have loved you! I lifted you up in the desert of my heart as a beautiful brazen image, perfect, inimitable; but your feet are of clay, when I come to look closer, and you are not quite the king of men I fondly deemed you to be. And yet I cannot help loving you—more fool I!—more fool I!"

The darkness and quietude of her rooms, the sense of her utter isolation from all of her own kind, began to weigh upon her, and even to frighten her. She opened the door and listened. The sound of voices in the lower parts of the house came floating up the staircase—Hugh's deep tones and the thinner voice of a woman, a voice that Charlotte recognised but too well. Without thought or care for her actions—for what worse could happen to her than had happened already?—and guided only by the impulse of the moment, she crept noiselessly down the flight of stairs that led from her rooms to the more inhabited parts of the house, pausing and listening on every stair as she went down. Near the bottom of the flight, and concealed from any one on the landing by a curve of the stairs, was a niche which had probably been intended for the reception of a statue holding a lamp, but which no one ever remembered to have been so occupied. Into this recess Charlotte climbed, and there stowed herself away. She durst not venture any lower down for fear of encountering Hugh, whose sentence of doom seemed still to ring in her ears.

The voices sounded nearer and nearer, as Hugh and his wife came slowly upstairs on their way to bed. In a few moments they reached

the landing immediately below the one close to which Charlotte was in hiding, and from this point their voices were plainly audible to her.

"I have left the bag that contains my medicine on the hall table," said Mrs. Randolph to her husband; "and as the servants are all in bed, I shall have to trouble you to fetch it for me."

"What! you a doctor's wife, and taking another man's physic!" exclaimed Hugh. "That will never do. I must make you up a mixture of my own in the morning."

"Do as you like in the morning," answered Trix, "only let me have the bottle I brought with me to-night. It has done me so much good that I intend taking it to the last drop."

"A most praiseworthy resolution! I no longer hesitate to fetch the wonderful mixture."

He ran quickly down while Trix waited for him on the landing, holding her candle aloft over the banisters to light him on his way.

Presently Hugh came back with the bottle, tasting from it as he came.

"Precisely the sort of stuff that I should have made up for you," he exclaimed, with a smack of the lips as he drew near Trix; "which shows that your London doctor thoroughly understood your case."

"A one-sided way of paying a compliment to yourself," answered Trix. "If I had not happened to say that the mixture suited me, I have no doubt that you would have made me up something entirely different."

"Just the same impertinent creature that you always were!" sighed Hugh. But it was the sigh of a happy man. Then the door of their room was shut, and Charlotte heard no more.

Charlotte crept back upstairs as noiselessly as she had crept down. That same sense of loneliness and desolation was still upon her.

"There must surely be other poor wretches in the world as miserable as I am, and with troubles as grievous to bear," she murmured. "They ought to put us on an island by ourselves, we who have nothing in common with the happy ones of the earth. The most miserable among us should be king, and they whose troubles were the heaviest should have command over the rest."

She was in no mood for bed. To sleep would have been an impossibility as her mind then was. So she coiled herself up in her favourite easy-chair, and drew a corner of her shawl over her face, although the room was pitch-dark; and tried to steady her mind, and to elicit some coherent chain of thought out of the mental chaos in which she was blindly struggling.

Go she must on the morrow—seek another home, she neither knew nor cared whither; but while still here, she wanted to think out and elaborate some great scheme of revenge, before which her late pet project of purloining her rival's letters should pale as a matter of little moment. Just now, however, she could not think, she could

only feel—she could only writhe, as the trodden worm writhes, no one either knowing or caring for its agony.

Midnight had struck before her return upstairs. One o'clock and two o'clock came and went, and still she stirred not; still she sat with the red shawl thrown over her head, like some witch awaiting the summons of her master.

About half-past two Charlotte heard the sharp ting-ting of the night-bell. She had heard it often before in the sleepless watches of the night, and knew at once what it meant. Dr. Randolph was wanted, and must go. Charlotte slid off her chair, and walked lightly across the floor and opened her door a little way, and listened. She heard the door of the dressing-room opened, and then she heard Hugh go lightly downstairs, and let himself out into the street. Crouched on her hands and knees, like a wild animal in its lair, and with every nerve on the alert, Charlotte listened without change of posture for a full half hour. Inside the house all was silent, save the voice of the old clock on the stairs, ticking monotonously like a death-watch that never ceased. From without there came no sound, save now and again a low, faint murmur, as though the wind were trying to whisper some dread secret, but could not make itself understood. When the clock struck three, Charlotte arose, and shook back the heavy masses of her ashen hair, and pressed her fingers over her burning eyes. As she stood thus, she saw clearly, as in a vision, the thing she had set her soul to do, and the way in which it must be done.

"I have shut the door behind me, and the Evil One has the key; and now I must go on, happen what may."

Then she went into her bed-room, and took off her red shawl and her grey winsey gown, and put on another dress, black, soft, and ghost-like. Then she slipped her feet into a pair of tiny mocassins, which some traveller had made her a present of, and which she much affected in her silent perambulations about the house. Just as she was ready to start, she thought she heard a faint noise downstairs, not unlike the opening and shutting of a door; but it was so slight that it might have been due to almost any other cause—to the creaking of some door or window in the wind, to some movement of the cat in the regions below stairs, or to the tapping of the old beech-tree in the garden against the drawing-room window as it swayed to some stronger gust than common. From whatever cause the sound might proceed, it caused Charlotte's heart to leap with sudden terror. She listened where she stood, without moving, for full ten minutes; but, as before, all was silent in the house save the ceaseless death-tick of the old clock on the stairs.

"I shall be frightened of my own shadow next," she said contemptuously. "What I have got to do must be done quickly, for Hugh may be back any moment."

Then, without a pause, and almost in one breath as it seemed to

her, she found herself standing in the corridor at the bottom of the upper flight of stairs, and within a few yards of Hugh's dressing-room door. A few swift, stealthy strides took to this door, which she found ajar, as it had been left by Hugh. Inch by inch Charlotte pushed it open, till there was space enough for her to enter. With this room, and with the room beyond it, she was thoroughly acquainted. The position of every piece of furniture in both of them was well known to her; and if only the person in the inner room were just now sound asleep, she (Charlotte) had little fear about effecting her purpose undetected. As, however, the person in question might chance to be awake, Charlotte was obliged to exercise the utmost precaution. One false step, or chance movement, might betray her, and frustrate her deadly design. Little by little, a few inches at a time, she advanced into the dressing-room, hardly breathing herself in her anxiety to hear the soft, regular breathing of the inmate of the inner room, telling her that she was asleep. In the outer room a night-lamp was burning dimly, by whose faint light everything would have looked vague and impersonal to ordinary eyes, but it was precisely the sort of half-light that suited Charlotte best. One of her eyes had strengthened and improved very much of late, and by such a light as that now in the dressing-room, she could discern the outlines of almost any object with tolerable clearness. Thus, in the present case, she could make out each article of furniture in the room while she was still a yard or two from it; the outlines being sufficiently clear for her to recognise what particular object it might be, although the minute peculiarities of its appearance were utterly beyond her powers at present.

Forward she went over the carpeted floor, step by step, black and silent as a shadow, till the dressing-table was reached. After a careful but noiseless examination of the different articles on it, she shook her head with an air of disappointment, and advanced still deeper into the room. At the further end, and within a couple of yards of the door that led into the inner room, was a fireplace with a mantelpiece of white marble. On this mantelpiece Charlotte found the object she was in search of—the bottle of medicine which Trix had brought with her from London. It was standing close by the night-lamp, the light of which shone full upon it. Peering Charlotte, when she got as far as the mantelpiece, discovered it at once. There was a label on the bottle, but her eyes were not clever enough to read it. She held the bottle up between her eyes and the lamp, and could distinguish that it was about three-parts full. The sleeper in the next room moved uneasily on her pillow. Charlotte stood for two or three minutes like one turned into stone; then, there being no further sound or movement from the inner room, she glided quickly back, and regained the corridor, carrying the bottle with her.

Along the corridor, and down the two flights of stairs that brought her to the ground-floor of the house, Charlotte now went without

hesitation or delay. Five minutes more, and her purpose would be accomplished. She made straight for the door of the surgery, which, somewhat to her surprise, she found partially open, and went in. She concluded that Hugh had had occasion to enter it before leaving the house, and had omitted to close the door after him. In the surgery a small jet of gas was always left burning, so that Hugh might be enabled to find anything at a moment's notice should he be suddenly summoned in the night; but even had there been no light, Charlotte would still have been able to find what she was in want of.

While Charlotte was still quite blind, and long before the image of Beatrice Davenant had come between her and her cousin, in her perpetual pryings into every nook and corner of the old house—if those could be called pryings where sight was wanting,—she had not let the surgery pass unvisited. Indeed, it had been a favourite pastime with her to follow her cousin Hugh there, and assist him in the concoction of his draughts and mixtures. Her assistance had probably been a hindrance rather than otherwise to the young surgeon; but being eminently good-natured, and perceiving how it gratified Charlotte to fancy herself of any, the slightest, service to him, he humoured her whim, and often claimed her help when he was not particularly busy, and a few minutes more or less in the surgery were of no great consequence to him.

Charlotte had learned to distinguish most of the principal drugs and medicaments by their smell, and as each of them had its own particular place on the surgery shelves, her retentive memory enabled her to recollect the positions of all the jars and phials the contents of which were in frequent request. Thus, if Hugh asked her to get him the opium flask, she would go at once to the shelf on which it was always put, and counting by means of her fingers the number of flasks from one end, she would pick out the one asked for, because she knew that when not in use it was invariably put in the particular spot from which she had taken it. But to make assurance doubly sure, she always smelt at the contents before giving the phial to Hugh.

A certain small top shelf in one corner of the surgery held nothing but poisons, and for Charlotte this one shelf had more interest than all the others put together. She never wearied of talking with her cousin Hugh about subjects that had the remotest reference to toxicology; and Hugh, on his part, if he did not always answer her point-blank questions on such matters as categorically as she would have liked, did still enlighten her in a certain degree as to the qualities and effects of the different poisons, vegetable and mineral, which were contained in the stoppered bottles on the little top shelf.

This shelf was so high from the ground that it could not be reached without the assistance of a small step-ladder which was always kept in the surgery. As if in aid of Charlotte's design—"as if the fiend himself had put them there on purpose," the girl muttered to herself

—the steps were standing to-night exactly under the shelf which she was desirous of reaching, so that there was no fear of disturbing any one in the house by the noise of their removal.

Up these steps—one, two, three—Charlotte climbed slowly, and as it seemed, only by a great effort, and then stood motionless for a little while on the top.

Had any one been there to limn her face, they would have seen how very white it was; how locked and resolute, with yet an expression of intense pain across the low, broad forehead, and in the hard set lines of the mouth. The beautiful eyes were still beautiful, but looked as the eyes of Lady Macbeth might have looked when she walked in her sleep, and could not rub the blood stains off her lily hand.

The flask she was in search of was made of thick green glass, and its place was the left-hand corner of the top shelf. Placing for a moment the bottle she had brought with her on a lower shelf, she was just in the act of putting up her hand to take the flask, when she suddenly turned with a startled look on her face, and taking hold of the skirt of her black dress, she made as though she were pulling it away from the grasp of some one who had seized it from below.

"I must do it! I must do it!" she exclaimed in an excited whisper, addressing herself to some imaginary person conjured up by her excited fancy. "I have sworn to be revenged, and I will not break my oath. Oh, mother, mother! ask me anything but this. Ask me to drown myself,—to poison myself, and I will not hesitate a moment. Life has no joy for me, death no dread. But this thing I must do, whatever may come after. Release me, mother! Release me, I say! Though all the dead in Elvedon churchyard were to rise from their graves and entreat me, they should not turn me from my purpose.—She is gone—gone! Ah, me! perhaps I shall never see her more, not even in the land of shadows, and when I am a ghost myself."

Her eyes, as she spoke these last words, seemed to follow the figure till it disappeared through the doorway. Then, with another great sigh, she seemed to drag herself back from all thought save of what she had yet to do. Without allowing herself another moment for hesitation, see took down the green flask drew out the stopper and smelt the contents, so as to make herself certain that it really held the subtle and deadly poison that she expected to find in it. Satisfied that she was right as to the poison, she uncorked the medicine bottle, poured on to the floor about a quarter of what it contained, and filled it up from the flask to the original mark. Slowly and steadily, without the waste of a single drop, she poured in the poison. Then she put back the flask, recorked the bottle, and stepped down to the ground, giving utterance, as she did so, to one of her low, witch-like laughs.

She was passing round a corner of the counter on her way to leave

the room when all at once she came to a dead stand, and in that single moment the expression of her countenance changed to one of the most extreme terror. A certain delicate instinct, which most blind people possess in a greater or lesser degree, told her that she was not alone in the room. Some one beside herself was there. She stood perfectly motionless, only breathing a little faster than she was wont.

There was one corner of the surgery, where a large cupboard had formerly stood, that was in deeper shadow than the rest, and it was here that the unseen witness of what she had done was lurking. On entering the room she had taken the opposite side of the counter, but on her way back to the door the skirts of her dress must almost have swept the intruder's feet; and it was her proximity to him, although her eyes had utterly failed to detect his presence, that had told her she was not alone.

"Who is there? Speak!" said Charlotte at last, when the death-like silence was no longer endurable. It seemed to her that it was not she, Charlotte Herne, who spoke, but some one else with a voice that came from beyond the grave.

"It is I, Hugh Randolph," answered the young surgeon, as he stepped out of his dark corner. He had come back after half an hour's absence, and had let himself quietly in by means of his latch-key. He had gone direct into the surgery, and after doing what he wanted, had just turned down the gas preparatory to going back to bed, when he was startled by hearing a light footstep coming swiftly down the lower flight of stairs and had but just time to step back into the dim corner, when Charlotte entered the room.

"You here, cousin!" murmured Charlotte almost inaudibly, and the tell-tale bottle, dropping from her nerveless fingers, was smashed into a dozen pieces on the ground.

"Wretch!" cried Hugh. "I have seen all that you have done since you came into this room. You are a murderess in intention, and would have been one in fact had I not been led here, and so enabled to frustrate your hellish design. Your mother was my father's sister; I cannot forget that. Therefore, all that I can do, even now, after this fresh proof of your desire to work me harm, is to banish you from this house for ever. But I will give you no further chance of working mischief while you remain here. I shall lock you up in your own rooms till nine in the morning, at which hour I shall expect you to be ready to leave. Upstairs if you please. I dare not trust you out of my sight again till I have you safe under lock and key. Go!"

Charlotte answered not a single word, did not even confront him with her eyes; but at Hugh's last word she walked out of the room. Out of the room, along the corridor, and upstairs, slowly, mechanically like a woman in a dream; the young surgeon, stern and pale, holding aloft a small hand lamp which he had lighted at the gas in the surgery.

Hugh said afterwards that never till his dying day would that picture

be forgotten by him: the picture of Charlotte Herne going slowly up the wide, old-fashioned, oaken staircase, in her mocassins, and her long, trailing, black robe; her face a livid white, like that of a person some days dead; her ashen locks streaming low down over her shoulders; her diminutive figure, erect, and braced up; and her bearing as proud and defiant as that of a queen on her way to execution.

To the young surgeon those three flights of stairs that had to be traversed before Charlotte's room was reached formed a veritable *via dolorosa* that seemed as if it would never come to an end. When the door was reached, Charlotte struck it open with a blow of her hand, and then without a word, or even a turn of the head, she went in, and passed at once out of the dim circle of light reflected from Hugh's lamp into the intense darkness of the room beyond. She melted, as it were, into the blackness, and became a portion of it.

Hugh shut the door, and locked it from the outside, and then went downstairs, carrying the key with him. At nine o'clock he went back upstairs, and knocked at the door. There was no reply. He unlocked the door and went in. He found Charlotte lying on her bed in the adjoining room, dressed as he had seen her last. A small empty phial on the ground close by told the tale but too well.

One of her last acts, if not the very last, had been to pin a scrap of paper to the bosom of her dress, on which she had written these words:—

"HERE LIES CHARLOTTE HERNE.
SHE LOVED NOT WISELY, BUT TOO WELL.
PITY HER, AND PRAY FOR THE PEACE OF HER SOUL."

(*To be concluded.*)

"TREASURES."

DOMESTIC servants whose master I have been in reality or in name—these are my "treasures." It is as well to state this at the outset; otherwise some readers of this magazine might consider the title a delusion and a snare.

There are "treasures" and "treasures." There is the servant who is handed over to you as a paragon of perfection—afterwards you often wonder why—and there is the one who establishes a right to the title by honest and faithful service, by evincing a genuine regard for, and interest in, your well-being. Also there is the servant who is a "treasure" because he or she is a curiosity.

It is now many years since I joined my regiment in Ireland, a boy of eighteen, thoughtful only of the pleasures of life, and ignorant of its cares and anxieties. The captain of my company, a worthy old soldier—young captains were scarce in those days—was kindness itself, and I always look back with grateful feelings to the paternal interest he took in me, the kind word he always had for me, and the firm but gentle reproof he administered to me when reproof was necessary.

One of his first acts of kindness lay in his selecting, after much thought, an old soldier of the company as my soldier-servant, in whose tender care he placed me. John Dodd, who was one of the oldest soldiers in the regiment, was one of the best officer's servants I have ever come across. He was not beautiful to look upon; indeed, his countenance was at first view rather repellent. His complexion was of the boiled-lobster hue, his eyes were blue but watery, and he wore a big red moustache and long red Dundreary whiskers which harmonised ill both with the crimson of his face and the scarlet of his coat. Yet the watery eyes had withal a soft sympathetic look, and beneath the scarlet jacket beat as gentle a heart as ever beat in woman.

John Dodd saw at once that I was green, very green, in the ways of the world, and especially of the military world. Yet he never traded or presumed on my greenness. He treated me as the boy I was, yet with the respect due from the good soldier to his officer. He taught me what to do and what not to do; he instilled habits of punctuality and neatness. I well remember how, on calling me one morning after a "big night" at mess, he looked at me sorrowfully, as I lay in bed feeling very miserable and not a little ashamed, and, shaking his rubicund head, suggested quietly that late hours and drink were things to be avoided. Poor old Dodd! he drank like a fish himself, I verily believe, though he "carried it" so well that

never once did I see him the worse for liquor, never once did anything but the increased radiance of his countenance and an almost imperceptible tremor betray his bibulous propensities. Wrong as it may seem for me to say so, while I took his admonition to heart and resolved thenceforward to abjure late hours and excessive joviality, I nevertheless could not help entertaining a certain feeling of admiration for the knowing old soldier, who could enjoy his drink so diplomatically as to appear always void of offence.

In course of time the regiment was ordered to India. John Dodd, however, with his good-conduct medal and his five good-conduct badges, was detailed to remain at home and join the regimental depôt. Before we left, the honest old soldier presented me with an ink-stand and a tobacco-pouch. The latter, which is by me while I write, was made out of the skin of a wild cat he had shot in New Zealand. As a last parting gift, he brought to my quarters the day before we embarked at Queenstown a very ugly pin-cushion which he had made with great care and skill of pieces of red, buff, blue, and vari-coloured cloths, ornamented with white beads, with forget-me-nots worked in blue and green beads in the centre and the words "Remember me" in brown beads beneath. He and his wife both wept over me. At least a dozen times did he wish me good-bye, sobbing the while like a child; and when the final parting came, I am not ashamed to confess that the tears sprang to my eyes, for I felt that in leaving him I was losing not only a trusty servant, but a real, kind-hearted friend.

Honest John Dodd! You have long ago been laid to rest, your soldiering days are long since passed, but your earnest devotion and disinterested thoughtfulness will remain ever fresh in my memory.

My next "treasure" was a faithful old Hindoo "bearer" (or valet) named Suraj something or other, whom my brother subalterns dubbed Sir Roger. What a good fellow he was! How angry I used to be because he *would* not speak English, and because I *could* not speak Hindustani! But all the anger was on my side; *he* was always patient, long-suffering, and willing, careful of my interests and as true as steel.

On returning from leave during my first hot-weather in India, Sir Roger, whom I had left in charge of my bungalow and belongings, greeted me in the verandah with a present in the shape of a tailless parrot enclosed within a cruelly diminutive cage. Knowing how the guileless Hindoo will often almost pluck an old bird to pass it off as a young one, I at first feared that even the wary Sir Roger had been imposed upon by one of his unscrupulous countrymen; and while thanking him for his gift, I threw out a hint at the bare possibility of the bird being an old one, in which case I should never be able to teach him to talk. The poor old bearer's feelings were wounded at the very suggestion. "No, Sahib," he said in an aggrieved tone, "he not ole bird, he young bird! I buy him soon after master go

away on leaf; then he all meat, no hair"—by which he intended to convey that the parrot when purchased was scarcely fledged.

To atone for my apparent ungraciousness I took the greatest interest in that bird. I provided him with a palatial cage, and many hours of those long hot-weather days did I devote to his education. After covering the cage over with a cloth, I used to sit alongside and repeat the same tomfoolery over and over again, till I was sick of the sound of my own voice. Sir Roger and the *Munshi*, who was teaching me Hindustani, evinced an equally keen interest in the parrot's instruction. They would take turns of "Prittee Pâlee" and "Pâlee love sugar." It was no use. Either from "cussedness" or from deficient cerebral development the parrot maintained a dogged silence for the months that I kept him—a silence only broken at intervals by an angry, blood-curdling screech and a wrestle with the bars or perches of his cage.

At that time my live-stock, exclusive of horse-flesh, consisted of a dear old dog, two monkeys, a mungoose, a mina, four squirrels, a kitten, and a small aviary full of avatavats and other small birds. Early one morning, before I was out of bed, I heard great "ructions" going on in the thatched roof of my bungalow, immediately over my head.

Shortly afterwards Sir Roger came in to call me, his face literally beaming with delight. He informed me that he had secured a valuable addition to my miniature menagerie, to wit two young wild cats. When dressed I went out and found two diabolical-looking little animals with collars and tethers on; and under the tree to which they were fastened was a large inverted flower-pot, in which a door had been made, placed there by the sweeper under Sir Roger's directions. They were not ordinary wild cats or *jangli billi*, that was very evident, but what they were I could not for the life of me tell. They had fox-like heads, and the most evil expression I have ever seen in man or beast. The *Munshi* said they were animals that fed on dead bodies, but as I had no dead bodies handy, and did not want any, I was never able to verify this assertion.

Sir Roger, who was firmly convinced that they would soon become tame and tractable, would squat on his heels by the hour—at a safe distance from the "cats"—snapping his fingers and coaxing the brutes with every sort of blandishment. It was very amusing to watch the old man at "feeding time," pushing their saucers of bread and milk within their reach with a long stick. His patience was wonderful, but unrewarded. For weeks the same performance went on several times a day, but the savage little beasts, with their unearthly cries, steadily repudiated the delicate attentions of Sir Roger.

They appeared to thrive, until one morning one of them was found unaccountably dead. The other seemed to pine so much that at last I had it killed. Poor old Sir Roger, whom they had cordially hated throughout the period of their acquaintance with him, was quite

distressed. For myself, I must say I did not share his grief; for though I was sorry the wretched creatures had ever been captured and placed in confinement, still once they were caught I did not care to let them loose about the place again—especially if they were on the look-out for my dead body.

Time passed till one fine day the regiment received orders to proceed to Afghanistan. I was only allowed to take one servant on active service, and consequently as a Mussulman or low-caste Hindoo was necessary to look after my inner man, and as Sir Roger, besides being too old, was not of sufficiently low caste to do this work, I had to part with him.

The poor old fellow was very downcast, called me his father and mother, hoped I would come back from the war a Lord Sahib, and so on. Mine was the loss, however, for a valuable servant like Sir Roger soon found another master, whereas I had to take in his place a lanky oily-tongued Mohammedan, a man with a perpetual grievance, rejoicing in the high-sounding though common name of Khuda Bakhsh ("the gift of God").

This beauty soon tired of the bitter cold of the Khyber in winter, and became very discontented; but it was not till we had gone farther up-country, and moved to a detached post in the turbulent Shinwari country, that Khuda Bakhsh's discomfort and dislike of active service caused his grandmother to die hundreds of miles away at Allahabad—a bereavement which necessitated his immediate return to India. A native servant's mother or grandmother will die for him again and again in the most magnanimous way whenever he is dissatisfied with his place.

I was not sorry to lose Khuda Bakhsh, in spite of the high character which I had received with him. He had drawn fabulous wages for some months, had been fitted out with warm clothes and a plentiful supply of blankets, and, as far as he was concerned, had done pretty well; yet I felt rather "up a tree" to know how I should replace him on active service in an enemy's country, especially at this out-of-the-way place, detached from the line of communications.

To my surprise and relief, however, a substitute was instantly forthcoming. This was a Madrasi Christian named Francis, a man with excellent "chits" (testimonials) and a great deal too good a knowledge of English, for he could both speak and write it. But beggars cannot be choosers, so I took him. We got on pretty well for a few days. He seemed intelligent and willing.

We went out for some days on an expedition, moving with as little baggage as possible. One camel was allowed for the kits of every eight officers, and, as the camels were to be loaded as lightly as possible, each officer was only able to take a flannel shirt, a pair of socks, soap, towel, and tooth-brush. Francis, who was with the camel on which my kit was carried, carefully contrived to lose my small bundle. As a consequence, when I wanted a change, I was

obliged to undress and wash my shirt and socks in a stream, letting them dry afterwards in the luckily broiling May sun, while I sat in the shade of a tree with my helmet on my head and a borrowed towel girt about my loins.

This little episode did not increase my affection for Francis. Nor was that worthy exactly happy and contented, for the dangers of actual warfare disturbed his equanimity. Hitherto he had passed his time in comparative safety in the stationary camps on the line of communications near the base at Peshawur. Accordingly, when we got back to camp after the successful termination of our expedition, Francis also had the misfortune to lose his grandmother, or his mother —I forget which.

My next venture was a camel-boy named Mághi, a very respectable young Punjabi Mussulman, who, having been sent by his father to enlist in a native cavalry regiment, had fallen amongst thieves at Loodiana, in the shape of gamblers, who fleeced him. Unable to enlist and buy a horse, and ashamed to return to his respected parent, he had taken service as a *sarwán* (camel-driver) and gone to the front. Being an intelligent and energetic boy, he had been promoted to the rank of *Duffadar;* but, numerous camels having gone the way of all flesh, his office became a sinecure, and I was thus able to get him as a private servant. As he could only speak Punjabi, of which I hardly knew a word, our conversation was mostly carried on by dumb show. However, he soon picked up Hindustani, and in a short time became a smart hard-working servant, always faultlessly turned out. I grew to like the boy very much, and congratulated myself on having accidentally become the possessor of such a treasure.

Soon after the regiment returned to India, a cash-box in my quarters was cut open, and a considerable sum of money was abstracted from it. Mághi was the very last person to be suspected of the theft. Moreover, it occurred when I was at mess, where Mághi was waiting at table behind my chair. I happened to go over to my quarters immediately after mess, and discovered the theft. I sent for Mághi. I might as well have questioned the Sphinx. To all appearances he was as innocent as my colonel. A few days afterwards, however, the boy was caught *en flagrant délit* stealing from a brother-servant who had saved a considerable sum of money with a view to getting married.

Of course it was a case of *cherchez la femme.* It came out that Mr. Mághi had a lady friend in the bazaar, and, his generosity to her being quite out of proportion to his monthly wage, he had resorted to gambling to provide funds. Games of chance having proved altogether too precarious a method of ensuring a steady and regular supply of the needful, he had adopted the more certain one of directly substituting *tuum* for *meum.* It also transpired that he had slipped across from the mess-house to my quarters, ripped open the cash-box with a knife, abstracted the cash (leaving the notes), and

returned to the mess in time to change my plate for the next course, with that placid and stolid countenance so peculiar to the Oriental. The last time I saw poor Mághi, he was handcuffed and chained, under escort to P——, to do "six months hard" in the gaol at that place.

It was now that an officer of the regiment who was leaving for England handed me over *his* treasure—a high-caste Hindoo named Damri. The character I received with him could not have been surpassed. He was indeed a most capable and excellent servant, though his caste was rather a stumbling-block. He was obliged to devote the greater part of every morning to his ablutions and *puja* (worship), after which he would eat his *roti-khána* * clad in nothing but a loin-cloth, no matter what the state of the weather. Once when I was ill I wanted him to remove an empty cup, in which there had been beef-tea, from the chair by my bedside, and place some books there instead. My order, quite thoughtlessly given, was too much for the pious Hindoo. With a terrified look he eyed the cup as though it were a snake or scorpion, backed softly out of the room, and returned in a few minutes with my Mussulman *khidmatgár* (table-servant), directing him to remove the offensive article!

Poor Damri! he was a good fellow in his way, and a faithful servant. He remained in my service for nearly eighteen months, and, as far as I was concerned, might have remained longer; but, owing partly to his dislike of the Punjab and partly to my going on sick-leave to a hill-station—the native of the plains does not like the hills, as a rule—he made up his mind to leave.

To effect his object, he brought me a telegram from Lucknow addressed to him, and informing him that a law-suit about some property belonging to his family or claimed by his family was about to come on, and begging him to repair with all haste to Lucknow, as his evidence was essential to the success of the case. He said he would have to start that very afternoon by the mail-cart, leaving me, still barely convalescent, in the lurch for a bearer. I told him he could go, and that he need not think of returning. At this speech he expressed surprise, though of course he really had not the remotest intention of coming back. With expressions of profound regret at leaving the shadow of my illustrious presence, he hurried off to catch the mail and go down to the plains.

Some days afterwards I saw him swaggering about the bazaar. Probably he was waiting for a chum to accompany him down-country; but, needless to say, as I had thought from the first, property and law-suit were alike the offspring of a fertile imagination.

For some time afterwards I thought myself rather fortunate to possess servants who were not treasures. They "pursued the even tenor of their way" without distinguishing themselves in any manner. After this I came home on long leave.

* Meal; literally, bread-food or bread-meal.

On my return to India I arrived at the station in which my regiment was quartered just in time to secure an excellent bearer, whose master, a staff officer, was leaving for England. This man, Gunga Rám, was a first-rate head-servant, for he kept the syces (grooms), sweepers, and other inferior servants up to the mark in such a lordly way that they really respected him a great deal more than they did me. From long service as a servant to bachelor officers he had acquired considerable wealth, and had quite an extensive wardrobe. He was always turning out in some different-coloured gold-laced waistcoat, while round his neck he wore a massive gold chain, and his pudgy brown fingers were covered with rings. Take him all round he was a very superior person, and so impressed with his appearance and haughty demeanour was a lady of my acquaintance that she dubbed him "The Maharajah," a name which stuck to him.

One of the very few objections I had to him was that he was teaching himself English, and would while away his leisure time by scribbling my initials or my name all over the walls of my house. Unfortunately for the Maharajah, after he had been some six months in my service, I was married. The immediate effect of my marriage as regards him was that his monthly bill for lamp-oil, matches, forage, blacking, dogs' food, and numerous such items disappeared. My wife used to drive to the bazaar and do her own shopping. Consequently the Maharajah was no longer in a position to make purchases on my behalf, and make a profit varying from fifty to a hundred per cent. He accordingly quitted my service after a short time. I was sorry to lose him for many reasons, though of course there was no alternative.

A month or so before the Maharajah left, we were fortunate in getting into our service an excellent *bheestie* * (water-carrier). To my mind the *bheestie* is the best class of servant in India. In nine cases out of ten he is hard-working, contented, faithful, and inoffensive; and he is gifted with more pluck and endurance than all his fellow-servants put together.

Ján Muhammad was not only all this, but he had the additional advantage of having been taught, while with his late master, to wait at table. We used him as *bheestie* and under-*khidmatgár*, and seeing what admirable stuff the man was made of, we soon afterwards promoted him to the high office of bearer and chief of all the servants. He was a real treasure to us, and I only hope his next master found him as invaluable as we did. Without exception he was the most honest and truthful servant I ever came across in India, and his devotion to us, and later to our child, was quite pathetic. He could not speak a word of English, which was trying to my wife, just fresh out from England; but she had a pretty little *ayah*, also a treasure in her way, who acted as interpreter when necessary. This *ayah*, by-the-bye, was one of the few natives of India whom I have seen

* More properly, *bihishti;* the real meaning is "an inhabitant of Paradise."

blush. She was very vain of her rosy cheeks, and once told my wife in confidence that, sweeper's wife as she was, she had rather a contempt for her fellow-countrymen and women, and was certain that she must have some English blood coursing in her veins!

Ján Muhammad and the *ayah* stayed with us for the remainder of our time in India. When we started on the long railway journey down to Bombay, the faithful Ján Muhammad accompanied us, the little *ayah* being replaced by an excellent Irish nurse, the wife of a sergeant in another regiment.

Ján Muhammad's assiduity and attention during that trying journey were only surpassed by his wonderful self-denial and devotion during the few days we spent in Bombay. The morning of our arrival our baby was taken seriously ill, and for three or four days her condition caused us the utmost anxiety. Ján Muhammad took up his abode on a blanket stretched in the passage outside the door of our rooms. There the honest fellow sat night and day, battling against sleep, in readiness to do anything he could to save the life of the little one he loved so well. I had almost to order him to go away to his meals. When the baby began to mend nothing pleased him more than to be allowed to walk up and down, up and down, carrying her tenderly in his arms, crooning to her, or talking to her. He had never seen the sea in his life before, but this did not prevent his coming out to the troopship with us in the boat. He was determined to see the last of us, and would have gone with us to the world's end. When at last he had to go down the ship's side and return to the *bunder* (quay), the poor fellow quite broke down. He stood in the boat waving to us until he reached the shore, and we were no longer able to distinguish him in the distant crowd.

Should our fate ever lead us again to India, I only hope we may be lucky enough to once more secure the services of honest Ján Muhammad.

After a short and uneventful stay in England, we were sent to Dublin, and for several years our regiment remained in Ireland.

So numerous are the stories which have been told of Irish servants and their peculiarities, that our experiences of them would appear tame. Nevertheless, of the many Irish servants we have had, some few are deserving of notice, and these have been treasures simply because they have been curiosities. No doubt there are hundreds of Irish servants who are treasures for other and better reasons, but it does not generally fall to the lot of members of the "foreign garrison" to secure the services of these excellent individuals. Moreover, the ways of Irish servants, as a body, are not well adapted to the requirements of fastidious English people. No offence is meant. I merely say this because it may be that an Irish servant who is a real "jew'l" to an Irish master or mistress, is underrated or misunderstood by the cold and calculating Englishman.

As in India, so in Ireland, servants on leaving their places are

furnished with written characters. The "chits" of India are the "discharges" of Ireland. Every servant applying for a place sends or brings his or her "discharges," and very amusing these "discharges" sometimes are. I may as well tell the English reader who contemplates residence in Ireland, that an unwritten law exists that a servant's "discharge" should have on it a certificate that he or she "is discharged having been paid all wages due." I suppose, as this is almost invariably done, it is a necessary precaution in writing a "discharge." At any rate it is as well to do in Rome as the Romans do.

Bridget P——, an extraordinary person, came to us after we had been some time in Dublin, with an excellent "discharge" from a large house in the country. She was a very plain girl with superabundant spirits and a "gift of the gab" that would put many a Nationalist "mimber" to the blush. She would "always be talkin'" —to use her own expression—either to us, the other domestics, visitors at the door, orderlies, postmen, messengers, errand-boys, or failing a listener, to herself. One day a brother officer, who always blushed like a girl when speaking to one, came to call about two minutes after we left the house. Bridget opened the door to him. "Is Mrs. M—— at home?" he asked, blushing to the roots of his hair. "She is not," was the reply. "She's afther goin' out this minute wid the masther"—then, after a pause—"an' it's bad luck you have, an' afther runnin' so hard too, an' gettin' so hot! But shure they won't be gone far; you'll catch them if ye run up the sthreet and turn to yure lift!"

Bridget had an uncle and aunt living in Dublin—at least, she said so. The consequence was that she was frequently asking for an "evening out." We always thought the uncle was a most hospitable man, for he was constantly inviting her to what she called a "spree." It was not till after she had been several months in our service that we accidentally learned that the "sprees" took place in the quarters of a married non-commissioned officer of the regiment, where she met an attractive and affectionate (though, I regret to say, fickle) sergeant. We never discovered the real address of the uncle.

We were sitting in the drawing-room one night after dinner, when Bridget returned from a visit to her relations. She knocked at the drawing-room door, and entered, looking very perturbed and holding a handkerchief to her mouth. Removing the handkerchief, she disclosed the loss of one of her very large front teeth, and launched forth thus:

"Oh, ma'am! what will I do, what will I do? Shure I've bruk off me tooth, glory be to goodness! an' nobody'll speak to me wid a face like this, an' I won't be able to show me face to any one, bad luck to ut!"

"What's happened, Bridget? How did you do it?" asked my wife.

"Oh! shure an' it's me own fault entirely for goin' aginst me mother's wishes and entherin' a Protestant shop! D' ye know Mr. Murphy the bootmaker? Shure an' it's his shop in Blank Street, an' he a Protestant, an' his wife a frind of mine, she bein' in service wid me before she was married; an' me mother said to me, 'Bridget,' says she, 'Murphy is a Protestant,' says she, 'an' don't you have any thruck wid him.' An' I was afther leavin' me uncle's house, an' I thought I'd come home by Blank Street just to pass the time o' day to Mrs. Murphy, an' I cot me foot in the door-step and fell down in the shop an' swallowed me tooth, glory be to goodness! an' but for his bein' a Protestant it would niver have happened, an' shure I'll niver be able to show me face lookin' such a guy!"

All this was rattled off to an accompaniment of sobs, and one would have thought something very terrible had happened.

The next day my wife sent the girl off to a dentist who replaced the lost tooth by a false one, and Bridget was herself again. A few days later, however, she once more put in an appearance in the drawing-room late in the evening, this time jubilant and shaking with laughter, though the false tooth was conspicuous by its absence.

"Shure I was pickin' a chicken-bone," she said, "an' I tuk out the tooth an' put it on the plate; an' afther I finished eating' the bone I emptied the plate, bones an' tooth an' all into the fire! Oh, glory be to goodness, an' it's a great laugh I'm havin'!"

She enjoyed the joke thoroughly, now that she knew how easily a dentist could restore her lost beauty.

Bridget once informed us that an Irish priest would not visit a sick parishioner unless he was paid half-a-crown in advance. As we are "Protestants" she perhaps invented this, under the impression that it would please us. She also told us that she had a brother a priest; but she did not say whether he increased his income in this business-like manner.

By-the-way we had another Bridget—a cook—for about a fortnight. This worthy was requested to scrub the front-door steps one day. A look of horror came over her face. "Is it *me?*" she almost shrieked, "is it *me* scrub the front-door steps and be laughed at by every one in the street?"—our house stood well back from the road, and a shrubbery in the middle of the garden sheltered it from the public view—"An' indeed I will not!"

"Why, servants in London always do it!" responded my wife mildly, terrified by the virago's outburst of indignation.

The cook's upper lip curled, and placing her arms a-kimbo she looked her mistress in the face, while with ineffable scorn and contempt she replied—"*Dublin* isn't *London.*" (Poor, one-horse London!) Bridget the cook left at very short notice.

Some years later, when quartered in the South of Ireland, we got another "treasure" with excellent "discharges." She was a highly respectable widow whom I will call Mrs. Flanagan, a plain cook but

a good-looking woman, and neat and tidy for one of her race; very civil-tongued and plausible. Finding that I was consuming about four large bottles of whisky, and a plentiful supply of wine every week, I resolved one Sunday morning before going to church to mark the bottles and decanters which were kept locked up in the side-board of our dining-room. Mrs. Flanagan happened to be the only servant left in the house. On returning from church I unlocked the cupboard and found the contents of each bottle and decanter considerably diminished. In the afternoon we went out to some friends in the country, but before going I placed a large placard "stop thief," in front of the bottles, locked the cupboard, and put the key in my pocket. Almost immediately after our return home in the evening, Mrs. Flanagan came up and gave notice.

After she had left, the parlour-maid, who had always stood in wholesome awe of Mrs. F.—this parlour-maid, by-the-way, had a pleasant trick of leaving us in the middle of dinner to converse with her "young man" at the back-gate—explained the worthy woman's *modus operandi.* She used to pull out the drawer over the cupboard, put her arm through and slip the bolt of the lock; help herself freely, slip back the bolt, and replace the drawer. Doubtless a very old dodge, but worth explaining, perhaps, to the uninitiated.

I shall not write my "treasures" up to date. To none of those of whom I have written do I bear any ill-will whatever; to many I look back with feelings of affection and esteem.

A RESPITE.

I CRAVE a pause amid the fret and grief;
A season's slumber, when the charm-drawn soul
Might dream that all the clouds that round it roll
Were curtains fashioned for its sweet relief;
And every vexing book had turned its leaf
And shown life's tangled issues clear and whole,
Their purpose glorious as the aureole
That crowns His brow Who holds the heavens in fief.
But never here the seeker knows true rest,
The meed of battles fought and victories won;
New plans of time and fate must throng his breast,
Nay, bread be toiled for till the setting sun:
On—on; through storm and radiance, must he wend
His difficult path towards an unknown End.

THE TOWER BY THE SEA.

I.

IN a certain suburb of London, and in a front drawing-room of the same, at about ten o'clock on a fine autumn morning, were two persons, a man and a young girl—the former seated at the piano, the latter standing at his side.

She as lovely a girl as you might well wish to see, with her wealth of golden hair, eyes the colour of forget-me-nots, a complexion like a wild rose, and a form such as needed but a year or two more to swell out into the full rounded proportions of perfect womanhood. For she was barely eighteen, and in her exceedingly girlish dress looked even younger than she really was.

He must have been about thirty-five, and a glance at his dark eyes and hair, at his mobile features and his delicately-shaped hands and feet, at once told of foreign extraction. His features were what are termed "good," and he might possibly have been called "handsome," had not traces of small-pox marred the harmony of his face. Not that the scars were very great; only just sufficient to call forth a regret from the beholder, who had time and attention for the exterior only, and to whom the depths within were as unsought as unsuspected. Who would not trouble to gaze into those large dark eyes, whose wonderful beauty went straight to the heart of those who cared to scan their soft, earnest truthfulness.

One of his hands was slowly turning over the pages of the music before him; his other arm had glided round the waist of the girl standing behind him. He drew her somewhat nearer and looked up into her face.

She slightly inclined towards him, but did not return his gaze. Nay, she seemed to avoid it. Her clear blue eyes had no cloud of emotion on their brightness; they were fixed calmly, and apparently intently, upon the sheet of music she held in her hand.

"My Catherine!" he murmured, in the unmistakable accents of deep affection. But she made no response. Something like a stifled sigh broke from his breast.

"I had a letter from Angelo this morning," he continued after a short pause; "he will be here by the end of May—just in time for our wedding, my darling."

A sudden flush passed over her face; her hand closed tighter upon the paper she was holding, and her head turned slightly away from him.

"Is your brother still at Milan?" she asked, in the tone of one not

really caring for information, but seeking relief in the utterance of an indifferent remark.

"Yes; but his studies are nearly ended, and he is only waiting for the fulfilment of certain formalities in order to come over and settle here in England."

"He has very great talent, you say."

"Talent—yes, he has, indeed. He was one of the first pupils in the Conservatory, and I hope and believe that he has a great and glorious future before him."

"He is much younger than you, is he not?"

Here she turned and looked down upon him. He was gazing dreamily at the page open before him, so that she had ample time to mark the grey streaks which, here and there, were beginning to show themselves in her future husband's dark locks.

"Younger by ten years, at least; and yet a better and an abler man than I ever was, or ever shall be."

There was no touch of envy in the tone—only a world of triumphant, glad affection.

"Ah, you will see how Angelo will brighten us all up when he comes. You don't repent of what you said about his living with us, do you?"

"Not in the least; only, are you sure he will like it?"

"Could he do otherwise? Ah, Catterina *mia*, if you had once seen Angelo, you would never have asked that question."

"Well, I meant—I only thought——"

"And just think what an advantage it will be for you," interrupted Carlo, who, like every Italian, never lost sight of the good to be gathered, no matter how deep the cloud of sentiment through which he might be gazing.

"But he is a pianist and composer; whilst I——"

"Have one of the most perfect voices that ever fell from mortal lips. When Angelo has once heard you, you will be his inspiration. He will write for you—his name is already beginning to be known. Ah! your voice and his talent combined must and shall take the world itself by storm."

A glow passed over the girl's face, her eyes flashed, and she involuntarily drew herself up. Who can tell what visions of golden glory gleamed across her young imagination like the flash of summer lightning gilding the bank of cold grey cloud upon the far-off horizon? Her red lips parted, and she was just about to speak, when the door opened, and an elderly faded lady looked into the room.

"Catherine, come here for a moment. I want you to help me in choosing some curtains." Then, with a nod to Carlo, the faded lady disappeared, and the young girl, in obedience to her mother's request, left the room.

Carlo rose, sighed, and walked slowly to the window. The view was not a particularly cheering one. The ill-kept strip of garden

immediately below; then a hard macadamized road and a hedge, beyond which a dreary waste of potato fields apparently losing themselves in the grey, lowering mist indicative of the site of the world's metropolis.

Carlo stood and gazed, and as he did so, imagination began her usual trick and conjured up a well-known vision of southern loveliness and glory in terrible contrast to the grim reality before him.

A low rustic dwelling upon the slope of a hill—the wooden gallery around the upper storey thickly hung with the golden ears of maize and strings of scarlet capsicums. In front, the wreathing vines trained over a high trellis-work—"*pergolata*"—with a rustic table and benches beneath it, a shelter of mingled fruit and foliage. Beyond this, and sloping down towards the plain, the well-kept vineyard with its long, luxuriant rows, all unbroken save here and there, by the heavy foliage of a broad-boughed fig-tree, or the light, feathery branches of the peach. Behind the house, and rising abruptly from the little piazza upon which it stood, the olive wood, terrace upon terrace, until the very summit of the hill was reached, and whence a view of marvellous beauty burst upon the beholder.

Right and left, undulating hills blue with olive groves, yet, here and there, breaking out into a mass of deep red crags intermingled with sturdy chestnuts. To the north, the spurs of the Apennines rearing their bold heads higher and higher, now gently rising in rounded swell, then starting abruptly forth in all the solemn grandeur of precipice and peak—a wild chaos of stony glen and pine-crowned height terminating in snow-clad summits revealing themselves in dazzling white against the deep blue of the sky overhead. To the south, a long stretch of cornfields and orchards, dotted with villa and farm, village and homestead, the summer haze half veiling its loveliness, as if trying to fuse into one glorious expanse of colour the smiling earth and the slumbering sea beyond.

All this rose before him in its magic beauty, awakening a thousand memories in his heart, filling his eyes with sweet unbidden tears, and utterly blotting out the dank fields and dripping hedges with the lowering grey above them.

A woman had joined the man and child, and was now trying to set fire to the half-decayed heap of potato tops. The smoke rose thick, and then slowly spread itself into a canopy, ever widening, yet never rising.

Carlo's vision changed.

An autumn day amid his own bright hills—the song of the vintage echoing from slope to slope, the sunshine gilding the exuberant wealth of deepening vineleaf and luscious cluster, flushing with yet richer hue the purple and amber berries amid their glory of many-tinted foliage. One day in particular rose to his remembrance.

He and Angelo had gone up to the chestnut woods, and there, in the hollow of a rock, they, too, had kindled a fire—a fire fragrant and

flashing, fed with fir-cone and myrtle-branch, bursting out into sudden blaze with quick sharp report like a salvo of glad welcome, flinging up tiny weaths of perfumed smoke into the blue overhead, higher and higher, till lost to sight and scent in the breezy brightness around.

And there they lay amid the thick aromatic herbs, flowering shrubs around them, a cloudless sky above, and miles of some of Nature's loveliest scenery stretching away into the dreamy distance below.

How they enjoyed breaking the scarcely-ripe chestnut from its thorny husk and laying it to roast amid the crisp brittle embers! The familiar aroma rose to his nostrils, the taste to his palate; he seemed to hear the scream of the falcon from the beetling rocks overhead, and see the shimmer of the sea lying blue and golden in the distance. They had talked so much about their possible and probable future up there among those breezy heights—the large white butterflies fluttering idly from flower to flower—from the flaunting yellow everlastings to the lilac asters—leaving the bee, wiser in her generation, to banquet amid the tufts of fragrant thyme and bushes of aromatic purple heath.

The very tones of Angelo's young voice and the gleam of his dark eyes surged up with the freshness of yesterday.

Their mother had died shortly after Angelo's birth, and their father, a tolerably well-to-do small proprietor and farmer, had never married again. He had wished, and had done all he could, to bring up his sons to be tillers of the soil like himself, and for a certain time, and to a certain extent, they had followed in his steps.

But a stronger voice than his had lured them on to another path—a voice within, whose imperative whisper bade them break into song while they should have been intent on more material things—plunge into dreams, when they should have united their efforts to those of the busy, active circle around them.

Old Don Bernardo, their mother's brother and their only living relative, had done much towards bringing about this revolution of affairs, to which, after some years of spasmodic struggle, their father finally grew reconciled.

Don Bernardo was the parish priest of a near village, and, like his nephews, had been blest with an inborn love of music. Good, serene old soul, he had ever done his best to push forward his two "sons," as he loved to call them, upon the path which he felt assured they were called upon to tread.

It was he who arranged and paid for the lessons given them by the old-fashioned organist of the place; and when Carlo was judged to be fitted and ready, it was he who, at his own expense, sent him to Lucca to study under the first masters that that most musical of cities could offer. Thanks to their care, and his own talent and perseverance, Carlo became a thorough musician, learned in every resource of the art, and able to give, in his turn, such piano lessons as made him eagerly sought after by all who had sons and daughters

ambitious of distinguishing themselves upon that much-abused instrument.

Lucca did not hold him long. An English family wintering in Tuscany carried him off on their return to England, and there Carlo gradually made for himself a thoroughly solid, almost brilliant, position in that most bewildering of all modern Babylons—London. While there, his father died. Then the farm was let, and, shortly afterwards, Angelo, always by Don Bernardo's care, was sent to the Conservatory at Milan.

If Carlo had somewhat disappointed his uncle's expectations, Angelo more than fulfilled them. Before many months were over, he was declared by all his masters to be of the stuff of which the Bellinis and Mercadantes are made. The wealth of melody that flowed from the soul of that pale, dark-eyed lad was such as to awake wonder in the many who listened, and untold feeling in the few who were able to appreciate and understand.

His studies drew to a close, and before long he would join his brother in London, settle down there with him and his bride, and then set about ordering the countless and wearisome preliminaries attendant upon securing a fair and public execution of a first musical work.

Don Bernardo was dead, and had left his little fortune equally divided between the brothers—"*un bel gruzzolo*," as the Italians say, in money, a crazy old tower and a few roods of barren land somewhere down by the sea.

Good, simple old Don Bernardo! He was now, doubtlessly, enjoying in a purer world those melodies with which his earthly career had ever been haunted.

The brothers were now alone in the world, with none to cling to save each other, and in his heart of hearts Angelo felt sorely wounded at the thought that Carlo had been able to admit a third into the holy bond that united them. He had never known his mother, and all the love that would have been his had been supplied by that of his brother; all the love that would have been hers, had she lived, had been lavished upon Carlo. Carlo was everything to him.

"Carlo," Angelo had said to him up there that day upon those breezy heights, "I feel that if any one were ever to do you a great wrong, I would tear his very heart out of him."

These words seemed to ring out once more upon Carlo's ear as he stood there in that bay window looking forth upon the dreary landscape. They surged up from the depths of memory with a strange clearness, and in his heart he felt and acknowledged that the man of to-day would surely keep the promise of that long past moment, should the need of so doing ever present itself.

At this moment the door opened, and Catherine entered the room. She crossed over to where her betrothed was standing and took her place in the window beside him.

"Why, how bright you are looking, my Catherine," said Carlo, gazing at her with fond admiration; "what has happened to bring that colour to your cheek, and that extra light to your eye?"

"Oh—but you'll only laugh if I tell you!"

Carlo shook his head deprecatingly.

"Well then—but it's no great thing, after all, you know—only something that's been puzzling mamma and myself for the last fortnight."

"Well, but what was it, dear?"

"Why, the new tenants of next door must have arrived. Though when, or how, we cannot guess. I'm sure we've kept a good lookout, both of us. Probably they came ever so early this morning. The windows are all open—and—— There, I declare, there's a cab drawing up at the gate; some of the new people, certainly."

"Most likely."

"Well, they can't be anything very great, after all, for the villa is let furnished. Bah, nothing but an old gentleman! How provoking!"

"Not so very old either—and—I am sure I know his face. Stay—where can I have seen it? Ah, now I remember! at Lady Tracy's concert, where my Catterina carried off the palm all undisputed, though it was her *début*."

At this instant the elderly gentleman glanced over at the bay window of the neighbouring villa while mounting the steps to the door of his own, took off his hat, bowed slightly, and then disappeared within the doorway.

Not a suspicion, nor any definitely uncomfortable thought disturbed Carlo's mind at the moment; but when, an hour or so later, he was steaming back to London, he certainly did take a leaf out of his future mother-in-law's book and set about puzzling his brains as to what could possibly have induced an elderly gentleman of the new tenant's air and apparent importance to have taken a furnished, semi-detached villa at Elling, and precisely at the time when fogs and bronchitis might reasonably be expected to put in their joint and unwelcome appearance.

II.

Two-thirds, at least, of that portion of the inhabitants of London called "the world" were there; for Stanley House was one to which people gladly flocked, even when there was nothing particular to allure them, while on this especial night there was more than enough to awaken curiosity and quicken the tongues of even the most indifferent of the upper ten thousand.

The rooms presented their usual appearance. Light and flowers, gilding and velvet; the great gallery with its statues gleaming forth whitely from amid orange boughs and palms; music, warmth and perfume; costly dresses and glittering jewels, the hum of well-bred

voices, and the soft ripple of low and pleasant laughter. All these were there, stamping the assembly at Stanley House among the most hospitable and splendid of the season.

A pleasant-looking little duchess in blue velvet and diamonds was sitting beside another very plainly-dressed lady upon a *tête-à-tête*, and the position they occupied gave them the advantage of commanding the entrance of all those who passed to get to the inner reception rooms.

"Now, please, tell me who this Lady Stormington is, about whom every one is talking," said the one in plain pearl-grey silk to her companion.

"My dear, you are perhaps the only woman in all London who would venture upon such a question—who could venture upon it without running the risk of being stared at. Not know who Lady Stormington is? Now, if you had asked who she *was*——"

The smooth white shoulders rose in something very like a shrug, while her Grace's pretty mouth was momentarily drawn down at the corners. For much of her life had been passed abroad, and she had brought with her across the channel more than one of the little social peculiarities of our neighbours.

"Well, you know that I only arrived from Canada a few hours ago, I may say, so you must pardon my ignorance and answer my question. If you can't tell me who she *was*, tell me at least who she *is*. I never cared very much about groping back into people's past."

"And there you are quite right; it is sometimes unpleasant for both parties."

"Lady Stormington then——?"

"Is a viscountess with a husband of sixty—she must be under twenty—four thousand a year settled upon her, and with every prospect of waking up one morning to find herself a countess. The Earl of Rockingham, you know, is nearly ninety years old."

"No bad prospect either."

"I should think not. Why she would have been on the stage by this time if Stormington hadn't fallen in love with her and married her all in a moment, as you may say."

"Indeed!"

"Not, you know, that there was ever anything to be said against her. It is true that her mother was poor and lived at Elling when her beauty and her voice made a captive of old Stormington. He first met her at Lady Tracy's, fell in love with her, and determined to marry her."

"She is really so very beautiful, then?"

"She is indeed."

"And her voice?"

"One of the loveliest ever heard, they say. I am so glad of the opportunity of hearing her to-night. I could not—— Ah, there she is!"

A vision of loveliness appeared upon the threshold. Seldom indeed had that high white and gold doorway framed a more bewitching picture than that which now presented itself. Radiant in youthful beauty, robed in costly lace and pale blue turquoises in her hair and on her snowy neck, Lady Stormington paused for a second as if abashed at finding herself thus *vis-à-vis* that crowd of eager, admiring faces. On her husband, however, whispering a word of evident encouragement—she was leaning upon his arm—she at once moved forward with quiet grace and took her seat not very far from where the little duchess and her friend from Canada were sitting.

"She is really lovely," murmured the latter. "I no longer wonder at Lord Stormington's marrying her."

"Well, I hope he may not live to regret it. He might be her grandfather, you know."

"I have no doubt he much prefers being what he is," whispered the duke, who had just come up and was trying to squeeze himself into position behind his wife's seat among a thicket of camellias. The manœuvre succeeded, and, once comfortably ensconced, he bent forward over the two ladies.

"Stormington's a lucky fellow, and there are few men who would not be glad to change places with him."

"You among the number, perhaps," said the duchess, with a laugh, and looking up at her husband as she spoke. The reply was a glance such as would quickly have set any doubt at rest, had room for doubt ever existed.

Conversation flowed into other channels, and after a while the flux and reflux invariable to all crowded assemblies had carried the duchess and her friend into the neighbourhood of the Broadwood grand which stood at the end of the next saloon but one. They seated themselves upon an ottoman, there to await the great event of the evening.

Two gentlemen, evidently professionals, were leaning against the instrument immediately on their left. They could not thus avoid hearing the conversation carried on by them in French.

"Poor de Sanctis, indeed! Who would ever have thought of his coming to such an end?"

"Who, indeed? But then there was always something queer about him."

"Queer? No—sad, if you will. There was undoubtedly a vein of deep melancholy running through his character; though, for that matter, I should never have thought of its leading to such a deed."

"Morphine, was it not?"

"Yes. But, to judge from his face, he must have suffered horribly. Bah! beautiful as she is, she is not worth putting an end to one's life for. Do you think so?"

"Certainly I do not. No woman ever was—as far as I have seen."

"Of course she knows all about it?"

"I daresay she does, though she was on her wedding-tour when it happened. If she could throw him over, as she did, in that heartless way just at the very last, you may be sure his death would not affect her very deeply. I shouldn't wonder if she did not feel flattered even at his committing suicide out of despair, for love of her. Why, she let him dream on his fool's dream quite to the very last, and it was only a day or so before the younger brother's arrival that she declared off. And he, as you know, was expected just in time for the wedding."

"She seems to have been determined not to give up the teacher till she had made sure of the title."

"Poor de Sanctis! He was no bad artist, either, though not to be compared with his brother."

"So I have heard. What has become of the brother, by the way?"

"Nobody seems to know exactly. He was quite prostrated by grief—not loud, you know, but silent and brooding. It appears that he went off immediately after the funeral, nobody knows whither."

"Back to Italy, I suppose?"

"Most likely. Everything was sold off."

"Ah! I wish I had known that. I should like to have bought some little souvenir of de Sanctis. I did not——"

"Hush!—here she comes. Well, she does not look as if she had kept any particular souvenir of the man whom her faithlessness hurried to an untimely grave."

Here the last speaker commenced hastily pulling off his gloves, for it was he who was to accompany Lady Stormington, who was being led to the piano by her host. And in the wonderful voice and stream of rich melody that rose upon the air, and echoed through the rooms, the enchanted listeners forgot that Lady Stormington had not been born within their magic circle.

III.

THREE years have passed away.

A lady in deep mourning, followed by another also in black, has stepped out of a first-class railway-carriage at a little station between Spezia and Sestri Levante. Her two servants are already upon the platform, mounting guard over a pile of trunks and minor luggage. A simple and somewhat old-fashioned carriage, with a pair of stout horses and an exceedingly bronzed driver, are visible on the other side of the low railing that divides the railway premises from the dusty high-road.

The station-master advances, cap in hand—interchanges a few sentences in Italian with the younger of the ladies, opens the little wicket with his own hands to let her and her suite pass out, helps her and her companion into the vehicle, reaching after them a bundle of umbrellas and rugs, shuts to the door with a slam, then draws back a step and makes a second bow, more profound even than the first.

The copper-faced driver whips up his horses and away goes the equipage, flinging right and left thick clouds of white, swirling dust, which, after hovering awhile, finally settles upon the unhappy ilex trees with which the road is bordered.

The sun is rapidly sinking and has quite gone down before the carriage has worked its way up to the top of the heights. There is a warm flush of purple and gold over earth, sea and sky; then a gradual fading into grey, accompanied by a sudden chill. Then the stars gleam out one by one from the cloudless, solemn sky overhead, and by their soft and soothing light the travellers reach the long, low habitation to which they are bound.

"What a lovely place!" was the younger lady's exclamation as, the next morning, she stepped out on to the balcony upon which the three windows of her bedroom opened.

And lovely indeed it was. A long, low villa built of dark red brick and perched upon the very extremity of a bold promontory, at whose base the Mediterranean beat in ceaseless, soothing flow. On one side a long range of garden and orchard terraced down to the very beach, the whole backed by a dark pine-wood, with which the spur of the Apennines on which the property lay was thickly clad.

To the left a tiny bay, with its shore of smooth white sand and its pretty bathing-house; to the right, and at but a very short distance, a second smaller promontory, crowned by an old, half-ruined tower and a cluster of low out-buildings. The evident decay of the place and the aridity of the rocky waste around it, forming a striking contrast to the carefully-kept villa and its wealth of gardens and exuberant vegetation.

In front spread the broad expanse of blue waters, with here and there a white sail gleaming faintly in the dreamy distance.

There was nothing between the façade of the villa and the edge of the precipice upon which it stood, save a broad terrace cut in the living rock, and protected by a marble balustrade ornamented with large vases filled with flowering plants.

The dark red face of the cliff itself bristled with aloes, and out of the bold clefts numberless oleanders flung their lithe branches. There was an air of solitude and retirement over the whole place, but quite unmingled with anything like loneliness or melancholy. How could it be lonely with blue sky and sunshine, rippling waters and blooming plants, light and perfume, with the song of the wild bird floating forth from groves of tufted orange and ilex, with the hum of the bee amid the flowers, with the mazy dance of the yellow butterfly in the pure, warm air? There was everything conducive to peace and repose: nothing to awaken or recall sadness or grief.

Catherine—Lady Stormington no longer, but Countess of Rockingham; her father-in-law having died just three weeks before her husband—seated herself upon one of the broad marble steps leading to the gardens below, and, head leant upon hand, gazed out upon the

scene before her. The flickering shadows of a large grass plant in the vase above her fell softly upon and around her.

How peaceful was everything on earth, sea and sky!

The folds of her black dress, which lay broad and sweeping upon the gleaming white of the marble, and the cloud upon her brow were the only dark things visible in all that serene and sunny landscape.

The tepid air, too, was growing heavy with the perfume of the flowers with which, from time to time, the acrid odour of brine mingled. The weary void which, since some time, had been making itself felt in Catherine's heart, seemed suddenly to increase strangely as she sat there amid all that wealth of exulting nature.

"Life is but a heavy burden, after all," she murmured to herself. And then she went on pondering as to how it was possible to feel discontented and sad as she did with so much at her command, when, but a year or two ago, one fiftieth part of what was now hers would have been too wild to have even dreamed of.

"Kate—Kate," cried a voice from the house, "how can you sit out in the broiling sun in that manner? And without a parasol, too. You'll ruin your complexion."

Mrs. Mellicott vanished from the window only to reappear almost immediately upon the terrace with a sunshade in one hand and an enormous black straw hat in the other.

"There, my love," said she, crossing to where her daughter was sitting and depositing both the articles in her lap; "these will protect you a little—though, if you would follow my advice, you wouldn't stir out of doors with the sun blazing down out of the sky like this. Dear me, how much pleasanter it would be if there were only a few clouds about! Do come in, my dear; the house is perfectly charming. I've been all over it, and some of the rooms are really splendid."

"I'm sure I'm glad you like it, mother; only don't ask me to go indoors—I seem to breathe so much freer out here."

"The rooms have been well-aired, I can assure you: there's not the sign of stuffiness in any of them. The great salon in the middle there is absolutely perfect, though there *are* some terribly scandalous pictures upon the ceiling. I'm sure I don't know what we can do with them. I've been puzzling my brains to make out a way of veiling them. And then there's a vase upon the staircase—it's quite outrageous! What can we do when the people begin to call upon us?"

"I'm not sure that there are any people in the neighbourhood, mother; and if there are, I hope they will keep away and not come disturbing us?"

"Disturb us! Why, my dear, you don't mean—"

"Yes; disturb us. We are here for your health, mamma, and a little, perhaps, for my own—and I won't have you worried with visitors."

"Oh, just a friend or two—people of our rank, you know—to an

occasional quiet little dinner and a pleasant evening. I do so hope you'll get a piano. It's my duty, you know, to help you to keep up your position."

The words were as well meant as they were ill chosen. A deeper cloud passed over Catherine's features, and she rose from her seat.

"I wonder what's in that dismal old tower down there?" said Mrs. Mellicott, shading her eyes with one hand so as to obtain a better view; "it looks just the very place for bandits; I see, by the way, that all our lower windows are fitted with iron bars. I suppose it is necessary, but it looks queer; we shall have to get used to it. But I am not——"

"Of course we shall, mother. Here comes Cesare."

"Yes—that dreadful servant. He would persist in talking his gibberish to me this morning. What does he want now?"

He came to say that breakfast was ready, and Mrs. Mellicott followed her daughter into the house.

* * * * * *

Weeks wore on quite uneventfully: outwardly, at least.

To the elder lady's great disgust, not a visitor had put in an appearance at the villa, and the peasants and others immediately around them seemed in no wise impressed with the fact of her daughter's being Countess of Rockingham. On the whole, therefore, Mrs. Mellicott's powers were not heavily taxed in "keeping up their position."

The weather had set in intensely hot, and the ladies, after returning from their morning bath, generally kept indoors until evening came on. They then sat out upon the terrace and watched the stars peep out one by one to mirror themselves in the broad blue expanse below.

A curious thing had taken place, however. A sort of weary restlessness had laid hold of Lady Rockingham, leaving her neither peace nor repose, save in such time as she passed there upon that terrace; and when there, her eyes would fix themselves as if fascinated upon the old ruined tower on the opposite promontory with an unconquerable obstinacy for which she could in no wise account.

The doctor said that the restlessness was a first effect of the sea air, to which she was unused, and that it would soon wear off; and Miladi was fain to accept his solution as the true one, even against her own better judgment.

One evening they were sitting as usual on the terrace, worn and weakened by the heat which had that day been unusually oppressive. A sort of lassitude seemed to have extended itself over the animals and plants, for the former remained silent in their leafy retreats, while the latter hung their heads towards mother earth as if vainly seeking from her refreshment in their weariness.

The moon had just set behind the pine-clad ridge, the stars shimmered down from the blue overhead, and responsive shimmers gleamed upwards from the broad bosom of the slumbering waters; the fireflies

danced amid the orange boughs, the breath of the gardenia floated heavily upon the night; not a sound was heard save the measured swish of the sleepy tide below.

Even Mrs. Mellicott seemed to feel the mysterious influence, for her tongue, usually so active, remained mute, and she sat there following the fireflies' flight, as they broke from out the gloom of the foliage to flash for a moment and then once more disappear.

Suddenly there broke upon the breathless night a flood of harmony so wild and wonderful as to make the hearts of both beat quickly, while Catherine's eyes filled with unbidden tears, and a strange shiver ran through her whole frame.

The sounds flowed on unbroken—waves wild and eccentric—now soaring into a strain such as angels might have rejoiced in—now sinking into a chaos of chords more like the wail of a band of lost souls than any music produced by mortal hand.

"Good gracious, Kate, whatever can it be?" whispered Mrs. Mellicott, on the performance coming to a sudden and unexpected end. Where does it come from?"

"From the old tower over there. It is evidently an organ, and—yes, if you look steadily, you will see a faint light in one of the upper windows."

She shivered as she spoke and gazed, and mechanically drew a flimsy shawl around her.

"But who lives there? Can any one live in such a disreputable-looking sort of a place?"

"Yes; a poor, half-witted man, so Cesare told me, whose name nobody seems to know. He has been living there off and on for months, and came no one knows whence."

"Who can he be?"

"The peasants seemed to say that he is a priest; but I don't quite remember. He is certainly a splendid musician."

"He might play in Christian hours, and not try to frighten his betters out of their wits with his musical whims. I feel creepy all over!"

So did Lady Rockingham, but she said nothing about what she felt. It was something all too strange to speak of, and, besides, her mother would never have been able to understand her.

"There—he's off again, I declare!"

Once more the weird strain broke upon the listening night, to float in myriad voices through the darkness—calling, jeering, praying, conjuring—every human passion, good and bad, seeming to find its interpreter in the strange medley of the terrible and the grotesque, the plaintive and the defiant; the leaping forth into warm life, the sudden sinking into chill death.

But it did not last long, only once more rose again into the former soaring melody that seemed as if it must be bearing upwards the entire soul of the player upon its mighty pinions.

Its effect was strange upon Catherine. A wild yearning urged her to join her voice with the soaring sound, but a stronger power forbade her doing so. More than once she opened her parched lips, but no note could she bring forth; a convulsive shudder mastered her whole frame, and she sank faint and fearing upon the seat from which, in her eagerness, she had risen.

The music ceased abruptly. It seemed to Catherine to be followed by a cry—a cry of sharp anguish such as a bird would utter if roused from its dream of sunshine and roses to find itself in the cruel clutch of the night-prowler.

Mrs. Mellicott had heard no cry, and, though her daughter strainingly listened for it to be repeated, nothing more was heard save the monotonous swish-swash of the waves below as they crept up to die upon the white sand.

Soon after, the light, too, vanished from the tower window. Lady Rockingham gave a sigh of relief; she herself could not have told why. The darkness seemed to have increased, and she felt a sudden desire to quit the spot. The lamp-light streaming out from the windows of the salon looked cheerful and inviting. She rose to go indoors.

Phantom music seemed to be floating around her—unsummoned spirits to be hovering amid the gloom. No wonder, then, that, without knowing why, she echoed the shrill scream uttered by Mrs. Mellicott, who, clutching at her daughter's arm, cried out: "There, Catherine, there—behind you!"

She pointed to the cluster of magnolias. Catherine turned. There, gleaming out from the dark foliage, were two eyes, fixed and fiery, never blinking, but staring as if to transfix the affrighted women with their gaze.

Neither moved, and Catherine's blood ran cold. Happily, at the same moment, Cesare came up; he had heard the cry through the widely-opened windows of the saloon where he was preparing tea, and hurried out to see what was the matter.

"There is somebody among the bushes there!" whispered Lady Rockingham, on his coming up; while Mrs. Mellicott seized hold of his arm in a way that showed how dismay could, on occasion, scare away dignity.

"Impossible!" replied the man; but, almost ere he could utter the word, he too caught sight of the glittering orbs.

Then from out the magnolias followed a sharp, snapping sound, not unlike the cocking of a pistol, only reiterated a dozen times or more, and mingled with strange guttural mutterings and a rustling amid the leaves. Cesare, too, began to feel weak about the knees; and who knows how the scene might have ended, had not the boughs suddenly parted, and an enormous horned owl soared forth and, with a loud, long-drawn cry, floated away over the heads of the spell-bound gazers to vanish into the surrounding gloom.

Impressioned as she had been by the mysterious music, it was only natural that Lady Rockingham should be extremely anxious to learn something more definite about the musician. But she was able to gather little or nothing.

For weeks at a stretch nothing would be either seen or heard at the tower; and then, suddenly, some night, when the night-fishers were out in their boats, would the strange, wild music come floating over the waters, and the faint yellow gleam would be visible in one of the upper windows of the lonely ruin. Not knowing by what name to call him, the people had christened him "il Frate"—either from the fact of the former owner of the tower having been a priest, or, more probably, perhaps, from his lonely and unsocial mode of life. For he wore no monastic garb—only plain black clothes, utterly shabby and wholly uncared for. From time to time he would make his appearance among the country people, buying from them such coarse provisions as they could supply, and which he, with his own hands, always took from the bearers at the gate of the little court with which his dilapidated tower was surrounded on three sides. The fourth side of the tower stood on the sheer edge of the precipice upon which it was built, and a line let down from the broken battlements would have fallen amid the breakers and the jagged rocks below.

Within the precincts of the place none were ever allowed to penetrate. The "Frate" avoided all intercourse except the most unavoidable, but was civil and soft-spoken to those with whom he was forced to speak. He was evidently not poor; nay, in the eyes of the good peasants he passed for rich, for he had had an organ brought from Lucca and set up in the tower—an organ reported to have cost a large sum by the men who brought it over and erected it.

Only one particularly strange circumstance had been remarked; whenever he happened to meet a woman, he would turn sharply out of his way, and, on doing so, had been heard more than once to mutter strangely to himself. This same fact might, possibly, have aided in the bestowal of the title of "Frate"; though, as more than one would remark, "there were few among the real clergy that led so exemplary a life as did the recluse of that solitary tower." In short, he was well-spoken of by all, and the liberality he was ever ready to show to the needy, amply made up in the public opinion for the chariness of his words.

Mrs. Mellicott, after "puzzling her brains" over the mysterious music and yet more mysterious musician for a while, ended by getting tired of the whole question. She hardly forgot the adventure with the owl quite so readily.

But she had her own health to attend to, to regulate all the especial minutiæ of her baths and diet, as laid down by a medical celebrity summoned over from Sarzano for that particular purpose; and all this, joined to the arrival of a box of fashionable novels and the latest crewel patterns, effectually did the business. The good

lady sank gently into a routine of life which, as far as ease and luxury were concerned, left nothing to be desired.

Catherine, on the contrary, grew more and more restless, and appeared to be utterly incapable of interesting herself in anything. Without herself knowing why, she would spend long hours gazing across the narrow ravine at the tower beyond, with a vague yearning in her heart to catch but a momentary glimpse of its unknown occupant.

But no token or sign did she ever see—only at rare intervals did the sickly yellow light show itself at the upper window—nor since that first wondrous night had the unearthly music ever made itself heard.

One morning Catherine had risen somewhat earlier than usual, after passing a feverish, sleepless night. Listless and even more dispirited than usual, she had with difficulty got through two-thirds of the long summer's day, and had gone out upon the terrace, as was her wont, to take her place under the grateful shade of the broad-boughed magnolia. The oppression, moral and physical, which she was suffering under were all but unbearable.

Mrs. Mellicott had retired to her rooms with a headache and a sensational novel.

A pile of heavy white cloud was slowly welling up upon the horizon, blotting out with stealthy pace the intense blue of the sky. At long intervals the faint roll of distant thunder made itself heard, but as yet, no breath stirred either blossom or bough. The cigala drummed forth her weary, monotonous music with ceaseless energy, uninterrupted by any other sound. She had it all her own way, and was seemingly making the most of it.

Lady Rockingham gazed longingly down at the cool blue waters below, the heaving was so subdued and gentle as to leave not even the tiniest fringe of silver upon the sands they kissed. Then again she fixed her eyes upon the tower-crowned ridge, and a curious impulse urged her to try and trace the eccentric path which led upwards from the strand. She tried again and again. Impossible! Rock and shrub, ridge and hollow, seemed to take a malicious pleasure in baffling her.

Then, with a sudden impulse, she rose from her seat and hastily began to descend the broad marble steps. Down, down, down, crossing terrace after terrace till, at length, she reached the little gate opening upon the rocky strand.

Out among the masses of dark rock with which it was encumbered —masses thundered down from the cliffs overhead in times gone by, and now strewn amid the chaos of wave-worn stone and boulder, that the sea in its moment of fury, had cast forth from its breast. Away across them all, her delicate feet heedless of the roughness of the ground over which she sped, impelled onwards by a will which seemed to reach her from without, and which she felt every moment less able to resist.

She was soon amid the stunted brushwood, and there lay the path before her. Now through thickets of myrtle and juniper—now losing itself in a bed of thyme; here winding around a gigantic rock—there dipping gently across a miniature ravine in which the coarse grass grew thickly, and from whose water-worn sides the broom and heath sprang. On, on, on, ever mounting, flushed and breathless, her limbs aching wearily, yet the nameless impulse ever hurrying her onwards.

With panting breast, and with a strange wild glitter in her eyes, she at last reached the summit, and halted upon the narrow platform upon which the tower stood. No entrance to the little yard was to be seen, so she skirted the corner with a strange feeling of having been there before, and stopped in front of the low wicket gate. Without a second's hesitation she pushed it open and entered. Desolation on every hand—an overgrowth of rank, poisonous-looking weeds, across which human footsteps, but not human industry, had frayed a species of path. Catherine traversed the enclosure with swift step—the unseen influence making itself more and more powerfully felt with every second that elapsed.

She entered the tower.

A large square room, all unfurnished save by a rude stool at the side of the ash-encumbered hearth, and a coarse plate or two upon the stone mantel-shelf above. The light streamed in through the open doorway, making the discomfort and desolation around only the more apparent. In the further corner, a flight of stone stairs leading to the floor above.

Urged on by the same imperious impulse, Lady Rockingham crossed the unswept stone pavement, and noiselessly mounted. She found herself in a room the exact counterpart of the one below, with a similar staircase leading to the storey above. But there was no chimney, and in its place stood an organ. There was a wretched bed, too, in one corner, a couple of chairs, and, in the centre, a massive table covered with sheets of manuscript music.

At this table, his face buried in his hands, sat a man. In obedience to the hidden power which had now taken complete possession of her, Lady Rockingham, her eyes fixed upon the being before her, stepped close up to the table and rested her frail, white hands upon its rough and dusty edge.

Here she paused, gazing mutely and expectantly.

Her golden hair had escaped from its confinement and flowed in a now tangled mass down upon her shoulders and on to her dark dress—her bosom was heaving with the unwonted exertion, and her azure eyes were riveted more and more fixedly upon the bowed head and the black, grey-streaked locks before her.

Her features expressed neither wonder nor embarrassment—a power unspeakably stronger than her own will was swaying every motion. She could only gaze and wait.

Minutes rolled on—though she could not have told if they were seconds or centuries. Neither stirred. No sound broke the silence save the heavy breathing of the man within, and the fitful growl of the thunder without. She saw and marked everything: but it was as if she had been a third and indifferent person, a careless looker-on, and not herself in any sense of the term.

A ray of sunshine suddenly broke through the window and, falling full upon her head, enveloped it in a halo of glory. At the same instant the man raised his head, and his wild dark eyes met the full and silent gaze of his victim.

But there was neither surprise on his face, nor tremor in his voice, as, after a moment's pause, he said: "Ah, you have come at last, have you?" There was nothing either in word or tone to terrify; yet, on hearing his voice, a shiver ran through Lady Rockingham's whole form. Her face grew pale as death. The voice seemed like the echo of one she had silenced for ever.

The two gazed on at each other, silent and motionless.

Once more the low roll of the thunder broke forth, rising from the sea apparently, and rumbling slowly over their heads towards the mountains. The sunny ray was suddenly blotted out and an ominous gloom usurped its place.

"For I knew you would come, sooner or later," he repeated. "He told me so."

He rose, and walked slowly round the table to where she was standing. Her eyes followed his steps, but she still remained motionless.

"Come—let me look at you well."

He drew her, with a sudden and almost brutal motion, aside towards the foot of the stairs leading to the roof above. Here the light was somewhat clearer.

His long thin fingers clasped round her white, blue-veined wrist in a grasp of steel. "I have passed many weary hours in trying to picture to myself what you are like. Let me see if you are worth the price he paid for you."

He closely scanned her form and features as he spoke, never for a second relaxing the cruel grip in which he held her. She stood passive as wax under his scrutiny.

"Yes—your face is an angel's; your heart—your heart must be that of a demon!"

He flung her violently from him as he spoke. She reeled, and would have fallen had not the rough stone wall behind saved her. A crash of thunder burst immediately overhead, while at the same instant a bright blue glare flashed with blinding intensity through the gloom.

"Do you hear his voice? He is crying aloud for vengeance—vengeance upon you, his murderess—for all your golden hair and azure eyes! You lured him on to his ruin; you broke the nobles

heart that ever beat—yes, in very wantonness—stamped out the life of him who worshipped you. You are in my power now—do you understand?—in my power! And I am Carlo de Sanctis' brother."

He was terrible to look upon, with his blazing eyes, as he gathered himself together like a wild beast about to spring. Catherine closed her eyes; it was all that she could do, for the spell was upon her, making her as clay in the hands of the potter.

The storm broke forth in earnest—crash following crash, gleam leaping forth upon gleam, till the whole universe seemed to reel with deafening roar and blinding glare. The warring of the elements appeared to mock at the fury of the man.

Suddenly the maniac—for maniac he now certainly was—seized her in his arms and, like a tiger carrying off his prey, bounded up the narrow stair leading to the flat roof of the tower.

He sprang upon the crumbling battlement, holding his burden high over his head with the strength of madness. Above, the raging tempest; below, the seething waters lashed into fury and leaping vainly upwards as if eager to get at their promised prey. "Are you ready to meet him?" Angelo shouted hoarsely into her ear. The words scarcely reached her, so terrible was the commingled din of the elements. But she had guessed their purport. She shivered in his grasp as a lamb shivers in the hands about to slay it.

"Hark to his call! He is weary of waiting. I come, brother—I come; we are coming, both of us. Listen to the death-song." Then he broke out into the same wild melody that had been heard floating weirdly up from the spot upon which the maniac now bade her say farewell to earthly life for ever.

The shrill notes rose to a shriek as they mingled with a thousand voices of the contending sea and sky.

Suddenly he stopped, and the unhappy woman opened her eyes. All around was enveloped in gloom. A blue flash lit up the scene for an instant with its fierce glare. For an instant only, but long enough to render visible a horrified group upon the terrace of the villa, the arms wildly extended in the direction of the tower.

And amid those collected there stood a mother, impotent to save her golden-haired child from the grasp of the madman.

Involuntarily Catherine turned away her gaze. It fell upon the low doorway that gave access to the platform. There lay safety—life, perhaps—respite at least! Ah, could she but reach it! But the long wiry arms closed round her like hoops of steel, precluding all hope of escape.

Yet still she gazed on, fixedly, as if she expected help to come thence—gazed on as if hope were not already dead in her heart—gazed on without even herself knowing why.

"Are you ready?" shrieked Angelo once more. Receiving no reply, he looked into her face. He followed the direction of her eyes. Then a sudden shivering seized him; an inarticulate sound issued

from his parted lips; the pale face grew livid—the encircling arms relaxed.

Catherine fell heavily against the battlement, while the maniac flung himself wildly upon his knees.

There he knelt, his outstretched arms—the thin, steely fingers widely extended—towards the low doorway.

"Brother," broke from him at last—"brother! why—why do you look at me like that? Why do you frown? Why do your eyes gleam at me in anger?"

Catherine gazed in spell-bound horror. She saw nought but the low doorway; but she shivered as do those who feel themselves in an unseen presence.

"Brother! brother!" broke forth in a wailing shriek. "Look not on me so—you scorch my very heart; and I loved you so—I loved you so! Have pity, have pity!"

He sank his head upon his breast for a moment and remained silent, breathing convulsively, as one struggling for life. Catherine durst not move. She felt that, had she done so, the man would have leaped upon her like a leopard on its prey. There she stood motionless, almost breathless, trying vainly to calculate the time that must elapse before aid could arrive.

The maniac lifted his head once more.

"Still there!" he murmured. "And pitiless still! Ah, your eyes, your cruel, cruel eyes are piercing my brain like red-hot iron! Ah, have mercy, have mercy!"

He flung himself forwards upon his face, then suddenly started and looked up. "Brother! brother!" he shrieked. "Ah, do not leave me thus! One look of love—but one—for our dead mother's sake—for the love of——" He sprang up and staggered towards the doorway. "For the love that——"

He never finished the phrase. There was a rush of feet upon the stairs, and the next moment Angelo was secured by the men from the villa.

Lady Rockingham had fainted.

* * * * * *

A long hospital ward, few patients occupying the long unbroken line of white beds; two "Sisters," however, grouped at the head of the one at the further end of the apartment. One on her knees beside it, the other bending over its occupant and wiping the gathering dews from the clammy forehead.

"If the doctor would only come!" she murmured.

Almost at the same instant he entered, followed by two attendants. He walked straight up to the bed and bent for a second over the patient. "Not an hour to live," he said, in reply to the Sister's mute inquiry. "If the Signora Inglese does not come soon, she will be too late."

"She is always here by two," put in one of the men.

"It wants seven minutes," rejoined the doctor, after pulling out and consulting his watch.

"Poor fellow!" sighed the Sister.

"Lucky fellow, rather!" retorted the physician. "Is it not better to go off quietly in a coma like that than to live on a maniac? For maniac he must have been. No man that was ever born could pull through such a brain-fever and retain his senses."

"God's will be done!" ejaculated the Sister.

The door opened, and a lady in black entered. Though young, her hair was white as snow. The terrible moments passed in the tower with the maniac, succeeded by hours of unconsciousness, had wrought the change in her. Her expression was sad almost to melancholy; but there was a grave and subdued charm about it never before seen there. It seemed to say that she had passed through a furnace of affliction, and had done with the world and its frivolities.

She, too, came straight up to the bed. Her passage was scarcely noticed by the patients, so used had they become to her daily visits.

"You are just in time, miladi," said the doctor.

The Sister who had been standing noticed a sudden change in the patient's face. She read it aright, and, laying down sponge and towel, sank upon her knees. Lady Rockingham followed her example. The three men withdrew in silence. Twenty minutes later all was over.

And thus began Catherine's hospital life, which many a sufferer has had good and abundant cause to bless.

A. Beresford.

OCEANO NOX.

(*From Victor Hugo.*)

Alas! alas! how many mariners,
How many captains, starting joyously
Whilst not a breath the gentle billow stirs,
And not a sound disturbs the sleeping sea,
Lured on by cruel fortune wide and far,
Have vanished on a night that knew no star.

And none may tell where lie the noble heads
  Hurled on through endless space to unknown shore,
Lost on the trackless waste no footstep treads,
  Through all the ages to return no more!
How many loving hearts have ceased to beat,
Whilst watching vainly for those wandering feet.

At times old comrades, round the cheerful blaze,
  Will speak of you: some ancient tale retrace;
And whilst they talk of old adventurous days,
  The shades of death are lying on your face!
They join your names in laughter and in jest,
Whilst on your lips sea-wrack and mosses rest.

They ask "Where are they?" jesting—"Are they kings
  In isles of bliss?" And then there comes a day
When you are quite forgot. Time's ruthless wings
  Have swept the old familiar forms away.
Where falls a shadow—deeper shadows fall—
Oblivion hides you very soon from all.

All have their daily round—their work, their lives—
  Only on some dark night with storms at sea,
Weary with waiting, white-haired widowed wives
  Rake up the ashes of dead memory
From heart and hearth—and speak again with tears
Of those whose names had not been breathed for years.

And when their eyelids close, there will be none
  To recollect—no willow tree will weep
Sad leaves—no name be writ on mossy stone,
  On humble cross no ivy garland creep:
Nor e'en the beldam croon for those at sea
Her evening chaunt in dull monotony.

Where are they, sailors to the deep gone down?
  Oh, you have direful secrets, cruel waves!
You whisper them when clouds of tempest frown,
  And wives and mothers weep unhallowed graves.
Yours are the mournful voices that we hear
When tow'rds the shore by night our steps draw near.

C. E. Meetkerke.

THE HÔTEL DU CHEVAL BLANC.

IT is not a picturesque building. The dwelling-house, a dirty grey in colour and flat-sided as a brick, runs along one side of the courtyard; on those at right angles to it, various sheds, barns and other outhouses are irregularly disposed; the fourth is bounded by a high stone wall, over which the elms in the ducal park beyond lift fragrant canopies of cool green leaves.

It is true that, as I see it, this unlovely spot is not without redeeming graces. The glow of a continental summer envelops and transfigures it. The dull grey and brown mass lies steeped in sunlight filtered through an atmosphere clear and sparkling as crystal; and over all arches, far beyond the scope of our island heaven, a dome of the darkest and yet most brilliant blue. I feel the warm air touch my face as I think of it, and I hear the voice of Madame Malet, the landlady, calling across the yard to her son Victor, who is now at play with the "English demoiselle."

The two children have taken possession of an empty waggon drawn up on one side of the court. Victor, with a huge whip, which he can hardly lift, and strange guttural noises, in excellent imitation of the local carters, is driving an imaginary team. Behind him sits the English demoiselle, her blue eyes shining, her pink cheeks pinker than usual with enjoyment of the expedition. She winds one arm lovingly round the neck of Fido, the mongrel house-dog, who, all unused to such blandishments, turns on his foreign friend, in mingled gratitude and wonder, two moist, pathetic eyes.

"Of what are you thinking?" screams Madame Malet, in a voice as melodious as the cry of one of her own hens. "Are you, then, mad to hold yourselves like that in the sunshine at the hour which now is? Do you desire to have a sunstroke? Victor, arrive this instant! Mademoiselle, you will do yourself an injury. Come—enter, both of you, and I will give you a *galette*."

At the same instant, from the open window on the second floor, a very smooth brown head is suddenly protruded, and a shrill voice calls out, in accents which sound sharp and clipped after the foreign vocables—

"Miss Julia, come in this hinstant! Whatever would your ma say? And do look at your dress!"

The children, who have jumped down from the cart, run across the yard and disappear into the house. Fido, who has jumped down after them, stretches himself to slumber in the shade. The tinkling of a piano floats out from the open window on the second floor. It is "Mees Smeete" practising her scales with youthful energy, which even the great heat does not exhaust. Until it abates, the rest of the English lodgers are keeping very quiet, and towards evening will sally

forth in a body for one of those long rambles over hill and dale in which they daily indulge.

Ah, what delightful rambles these were through that fruitful Norman land! blooming with gardens, and orchards, and woodland, and watered by bright streams gliding smoothly on, foaming impetuously past the scattered mills and homesteads. The air grew cooler and cooler as we wandered on; the glowing pink above us faded into grey; sometimes the perfumed darkness of a summer's night gathered over all things before we returned tired and hungry to the Cheval Blanc; too tired to be captious about the unadorned ugliness of our dining-room, ill-lighted by two flickering candles, hungry enough to sup with relish on artichokes, eggs, freshly-made *galettes*, and nice milk served in an earthenware *terrine* about the size of an ordinary English foot-bath.

One day in the week the drowsy calm of the courtyard was dispersed by an inrush of noise and bustle from the market-place outside. Early in the morning the two-wheeled carts from all the villages round came pouring into the town, each bearing its freight of blue-smocked men and white-capped women. Then followed a great unpacking of garden and dairy produce, and betimes the market-place was fitted with stalls sheltered by canvas awnings, or gay umbrellas, under which eggs, fowls, butter, cheese, vegetables and fruit were temptingly outspread before the eyes of the townspeople.

The men congregated mostly round the sacks of corn, which were ranged in rows before the Hôtel de Ville, and a low deep hum came from that quarter; whereas, a very Babel of shrill vociferation seemed to cleave the air above the stalls where the women chaffered over their wares.

To the foreign observer, indeed, a good deal of time appeared needlessly squandered over that duel of words which invariably preceded the purchase of the smallest article; but then on bright summer mornings how pleasantly such time was wasted! Even a sober English buyer might well be tempted to argue the price of a peach or an apple with a vendor as blooming as her rosy fruit. Most Norman peasant women, young and middle-aged, are pleasant to look upon; erect, with well-set heads and oval faces, straight noses, and fine dark eyes steadily surveying you from under thoughtful brows. Such comeliness is very well set off by a diadem of snowy muslin and crisp white lace, and the long gold pendants which have drooped from the ears of successive generations.

On market mornings there was an almost unceasing rattle of wheels and hoofs under the low archway which led from the "Place" to the courtyard of the Cheval Blanc, and by mid-day it was quite blocked by row after row of empty spring-carts. The male owners thereof all dined more or less noisily in the big kitchen, or in very warm weather in a large open shed, made beautiful for the occasion with green boughs, and surnamed "*la salle verte*."

Then would Madame Malet, in her *rôle* of hostess, shine to full advantage—or disadvantage. The tones of her voice encouraging her guests, or rallying her maids, filled the courtyard with discordant echoes. She was here, there, and everywhere, distributing smoking dishes of soup and *bouilli*, huge jugs of sour cider, and even at times jests as heavy as her tread.

Her husband's less conscious part was to sit at the head of the dinner-table, and set the *convives* a good example in the way of eating and drinking—a task which he fulfilled with his usual placidity. A fat dark man, with a kindly face and sleepily gentle manner, he was in demeanour as in disposition the opposite of his wife; fortunately so, or life at the Cheval Blanc might have been unendurable. Not that poor Madame Malet was in reality a shrew. All this sound and fury signified nothing but the effervescence of an excitable temperament.

She was a big, clumsy, fair—or, lest I be utterly misunderstood, let me say blonde—woman, with a large nose, and great loosely-hanging lips. A kindly gleam would often lighten her pale blue eyes, generally clouded by a Martha-like anxiety about household matters, and a joyless view of life in general. At one time she had so far mistaken her vocation as to aspire to be a sick-nurse at the Hôtel-Dieu, but M. Malet's intervention had fortunately altered a resolution so unfavourable to the inmates of that establishment. Yet Madame Malet had a tender heart for the sick and the weak. I can see her now standing in the most ungraceful of attitudes beside our dinner-table on the days when the *menu* included a freshly-roasted joint, thrusting unceremoniously a large spoon between the carver and the dish, whilst she called out in tones of harsh command: "*Pour la poitrinaire, s'il-vous-plait,*" which signified that before any one was served, a wine-glassful of the crimson gravy must be secured for a young invalid-friend of Madame Malet's.

It was apparently the power of expression, not of feeling, that was lacking. With eyes full of sympathetic tears, Madame Malet would rend the ears and shatter the nerves of the victim she sought to succour. Even towards Victor, her only child, and the very apple of her eye, her bearing was not softened. On the contrary, he was more hustled and shouted at than any one else. This, her well-meant fashion of urging him along the right path, might have goaded him into quite the opposite direction, had he not been happily endowed with a heavily phlegmatic and obtuse disposition, which enabled him to receive with more than indifference the tempests of indignation and reproof which periodically descended on him.

He was an unattractive-looking child, who had inherited his mother's hay-coloured hair and general mealiness of complexion. He was dedicated to the Virgin, a fact which always perplexed English and Protestant observers who could detect no outward or visible sign of this benign connection save in the colour of Victor's garments, which

were always scrupulously blue, in honour of his patron. The devotion which was her due he paid vicariously through his mother. It was she who derived the keenest satisfaction from her son's religious privileges. She used to point with joy and pride to a plaster image of the Madonna, crowned with artificial flowers, that kept watch and ward beside Victor's bed, as well as to a trousseau of smart clothes, and a wonderful collection of presents of various kinds slowly accumulating for what seemed to be the *ultima Thule* of Madame Malet's earthly hopes—the day of Victor's First Communion. Madame Malet would handle these treasures almost tenderly as she displayed them to the English demoiselle and to the smooth-haired lady's-maid, who surveyed them with that mixture of curiosity and contempt she assigned to foreign things and persons.

Victor himself cared for none of these things, and did not affect to do so. He was not devotionally inclined, and his only manifestation of religious zeal was his habit of shouting "Alleluia" lustily when he played at horses on Sundays or holy days. It failed unfortunately to satisfy Madame Malet's standard of religious observance.

"Hein! your alleluias!" she would exclaim bitterly, with the intensely ironical intonation her son's shallow devices so often provoked. "Rose, conduct Victor to the mass this instant." And to the mass this ward of the Madonna would be forthwith conveyed, loudly weeping and protesting as he went.

He was not more remarkable for his learning than for his piety. I well remember, on a bright summer evening, his inglorious return from the distribution of prizes at the village school. The reward of merit is lavish on such occasions. Everybody, good, bad and indifferent, receives something, and the really deserving pupils are laden with more books in gorgeous bindings than they can carry, and crowned with a corresponding number of exquisitely neat laurel wreaths.

Victor entered the courtyard with a small thin book and a solitary wreath, the meagre portion of the dunce. He was himself disposed to make the best of it, and he presented the book with a self-conscious air to his mother, and even ventured in true orthodox fashion to hang the wreath upon her head. It was no easy feat to accomplish, for Madame Malet, stiff with displeasure, made no effort to assist him, and he succeeded, by standing on tiptoe, in so placing it, that it hung all awry over one eyebrow, imparting the last fine touch to the look of grim and speechless disgust with which she contemplated these tokens of her son's proficiency.

Regularly every morning a quaint little figure came through the archway. This was Madame Martin, who gave daily lessons to Mademoiselle Smeete (*Anglicé*, Smith), the elder sister of the English demoiselle. Madame Martin had a tiny chocolate-coloured face, supported by a disproportionately long and thin neck, and bore, probably

in consequence of this, a striking resemblance to a tortoise. She had a bird-like profile, with a sweet-tempered mouth and two prominent and sparkling black eyes. She corrected the exercises of her pupil, and kept time beside her while she practised on the piano with a minute blue-veined hand, stained and seamed by household labour.

Her marriage, seeing that in her maiden days she had been governess to the Duke's daughter, was not so socially illustrious as might have been expected. On the other hand, it was highly romantic, unlikely as that may appear to those who have not observed how superior is the destiny of everyday life to the prejudices of novel-writers and novel-readers, and how constantly she selects for the heroes and heroines of her most interesting stories persons devoid either of youth or beauty.

It was under the screen of sacred music, or rather of its cultivation, that Cupid assailed Madame Martin.

In the village choir which she directed there was a young carpenter with a sweet tenor voice and two melting dark eyes. Mademoiselle Guérin, as she then was, fell in love with this engaging chorister. He returned her affection, and finally proposed and was accepted.

The engagement was, of course, viewed with anything but approbation by her friends at the Château and elsewhere: whenever did a purely romantic alliance find favour in the eyes of the bystanders? the practical advantages of the proposed union are all that they consider! But the love in this case was vigorous enough to survive all discouragement. They were married, and lived happy ever afterwards —or at least were so living when we exiles were quartered at the Cheval Blanc. Mademoiselle Smeete, who once caught sight of Monsieur Martin, maintained that his eyes, besides being handsome, were brimful of honesty and tenderness; and Madame Martin's domestic happiness was written plainly in her beaming little face.

The relations between the pupil and her teacher were singularly happy. Mademoiselle Smeete was enchanted by the liveliness and charm of Madame Martin's manners and conversation; and Madame Martin for years afterwards descanted so warmly on the intelligence and application of Mademoiselle Smeete, that she became a bugbear to all later pupils. They had their differences of opinion nevertheless, in the matter of composition more especially. Mademoiselle Smeete rather aimed at originality of expression, whilst Madame Martin preferred terms consecrated by long and constant use. "The season of bud and blossom and hope," Mademoiselle Smeete would, for instance, write with the grandiloquence natural to her tender age; and Madame Martin, after doubtfully contemplating this fine phrase for some seconds, would mercilessly erase it with one stroke of her pen, and triumphantly substitute "the springtime."

With regard to romantic literature, Madame Martin entertained opinions which Mademoiselle Smeete considered to be inconveniently fastidious. The novels composed especially for *jeunes filles*, provided

by Madame Martin for the entertainment of her pupil, were very far from satisfying the robust appetite of that young Englishwoman. Once, indeed, in consideration of the emancipated position of the British "demoiselle," Madame Martin did, with some hesitation and many apologies to her own conscience, confide to Mademoiselle Smeete a novel which, "for everything in the world she would not have placed in the hands of a French pupil." The expectations aroused in Mademoiselle Smeete's mind by this assurance were not altogether fulfilled. In this, even from Madame Martin's point of view, highly virtuous story, there was but one incident which could alarm the most sensitive delicacy. A husband fell in love with his own wife, and on declaring his passion, went so far as to embrace her. Even Madame Martin did not assert that this was positively improper, but she characterised it disapprovingly as "*un peu trop fort.*"

The conversation lessons which formed part of these studies took place in the Park, where the owner kindly permitted the English visitors to wander at will. Madame Martin herself, in virtue of her still unbroken connection with the Château, had a key of her own.

As she and her English pupil paced the shady walks on brilliant summer mornings, she would discourse fluently on bygone days, especially those passed at the Château itself, calling up before the mind of her listener quaint glimpses of foreign life and customs. The central figure in nearly all these reminiscences was her quondam pupil, Mademoiselle Jeanne d'Harcourt, the Duke's granddaughter, a young lady who ventured, it appeared, to have tastes and opinions of her own, and above all with so eccentric a disinclination for marriage that she persisted in remaining unwed till she was past twenty-four, when, as Madame Martin simply expressed it, her position became *ridicule dans le monde.* To Mademoiselle Smeete it seemed worse than ridiculous, since even at that advanced age Mademoiselle Jeanne was so tied and bound by conventional restrictions as to be unable to go unchaperoned from one end of her grandfather's château to another. Probably Mademoiselle Jeanne herself somewhat chafed at these trammels, for at last she listened to the addresses of a young man, or rather of the friends of a young man, who was amiable and studious and domestic in his tastes. In other respects he was hardly a suitable wooer for her father's child, but things had come to such a pass in the matter of age, that her family had to be thankful for small mercies.

Occasionally we lunched at the Château, a huge barrack-like building in which the whole population of the little town might easily have been lodged. Once upon a time it was none too big, we may suppose, for the establishment of the family which, when we knew it, had dwindled to a man and a maid.

We used to pass through a long succession of salons almost unfurnished, but lined with family portraits of illustrious soldiers and court ladies, till we reached the little drawing-room which the Duchess

had made her own, or the library where she was for ever re-arranging the books.

She was a kindly old lady, with that simplicity of manner which seems in all countries the mark of high-breeding. She wore soft-coloured silks and rich old lace drooped over her snow-white hair and her tiny withered hands. There was no sign in her placid cheerful face of the storms which she had weathered. Her parents were guillotined during the French Revolution, and she herself, an infant of three or four, stood behind them on the scaffold awaiting the same fate, when a *bourreau*, moved by a sudden impulse of pity, snatched her up and tossed her into the heaving crowd below. She was picked up by one of her own class who had escaped the popular fury, and who, when he opened the locket that hung round the child's neck, recognised the portrait of his sister, and perceived that it was his own niece whom fate had thus strangely thrust into his arms. Of her subsequent fate I know nothing, save, of course, that she married the Duke d'Harcourt.

The evening of her days was as peaceful as that which so often follows a stormy morning. As she prayed in the chapel, or sat at meat with her little granddaughter, or walked in the long green alleys of the park, undisturbed and unthreatened, that reign of terror, if she remembered it at all, must have seemed to her no more real than a tale that is told.

The family-party at the Château included at that time only the Duchess and her granddaughter, Marie, a pretty little blonde person who was apt to look thin and blanched when brought into the trying neighbourhood of our blooming "English demoiselle." In the matter of accomplishments, however, she left that little idler far behind. Her musical performances used to transfix the English demoiselle with surprise and admiration. Her eyes grew larger, and her lips parted, not unbecomingly, with awe as she, who could hardly stumble through "Lilla is a lady," listened to Mademoiselle Marie, playing whole sonatas, classical sonatas, with the precision of a machine and about as much feeling.

But how far into the past has time swept all this! The English demoiselle is now the mother of a good sized-family, and it is years since I read in a fashionable chronicle the list of ravishing toilettes prepared for the trousseau of Mademoiselle Marie d'Harcourt.

The railway has reached Harcourt since we left it. Perhaps the Hôtel du Cheval Blanc, like many of those who spent together there so pleasant a summer, exists no longer save in the memory of the survivors.

A TALE OF A WEDDING-CAKE.

I.

"THERE, that's exactly the kind of wedding-cake I should like to have when I am married! Look at it, Gladys; look, Olive; look, Molly! Aren't those sprays of flowers quite too lovely? Oh! I shall certainly have one just like that—only a good bit larger—if I can only remember it, and describe it to Gunters!"

The speaker was the eldest of a charming quartette of girls, shorter than her sisters, but instinct with a certain sense of superiority over them, as having completed her twenty-first year, and thus attained to full young ladyhood. Opinions differed as to which was the prettiest of them—plump, brown-eyed Bee; Gladys, with her dazzling fair skin and golden hair; Olive, with her dark beauty; or fifteen-year-old Molly, whose curly locks still dispersed themselves, mantlewise, over her slender shoulders. But all Axeford knew that the Mervyns were far and away the prettiest girls in the town; and the girls themselves had a certain little air of knowing it too—how should they help it, with so many friends and admirers ready to inform them of the fact?

"I like to think of our weddings—what fun they'll be!" said Molly, still gazing at the cake. "Of course yours will be the first in the family, Bee; and then we shall all be your bridesmaids, and we'll wear pale blue, with the loveliest blush roses, don't you think?"

"Oh, dear me—dear me! so this is what your silly little heads are running on! I always was afraid of it, and now you stand convicted out of your own mouths! To you life is nothing but fun and flirting, marrying and giving in marriage—now, isn't it so?"

"And to you life is all strawberries and cream—now, isn't it so?" says impudent Molly, linking her arm in that of their assailant: a stout, merry-faced lady of something over fifty, who has the air of finding the world a very excellent place to live in.

"You saucy child! But come along; come back to tea with me; and I'll tell you something that will amuse you—something that that wedding-cake has put into my mind. I want you to taste some scones I made to-day; you girls, with your grand house, and your array of servants, don't know anything of the pleasures of cooking little dishes for oneself. Yes, and I'll give you strawberries and cream too—all except Molly—as much as ever you can eat; that's the way to enjoy strawberries, *I* say. You can stay for the evening, can't you? No admirers coming to-night, are there? Nor any Grammar-School boys, eh, Molly?"

"No, no; *don't*, Miss Summers!" said Molly, turning a little red,

and feeling nervously at her pocket for a packet of almond rock, which a devoted admirer among those very Grammar-School boys presented her with only to-day; while Bee and Gladys looked consideringly at each other.

"Saturday—Saturday—it's Monday Tommy Atkins comes with his flute, isn't it? Yes. Oh, there's only Mr. Burwood and Mr. Wilkes coming to-night—papa's friends, you know—and they won't come till nine or ten, because papa dines in London to-day. So we'll give up dining, and have tea with you instead—that'll be jolly!"

These evenings spent with Miss Summers were of no infrequent occurrence, and it was not her fault that they were not more common still. She did what in her lay to "mother" these girls, scolding and laughing at them for their little follies, but loving them dearly, as they knew full well. She often felt anxious for them, for their mother was dead; and their father, a wealthy man, seemed to have but one idea as to their up-bringing—viz., that young things should have as good a time as possible. Bee was a little queen in her own household, and in society too; and her sisters were princesses of the blood. Rich, prosperous, and charming, they were bowed down to by everybody; boyish admirers haunted the house, and craved the royal bounty; and even "papa's friends" rendered homage to the powers that were, executing delicate little commissions in town, mending fans, holding wool, and making themselves generally useful, but yet reserving to themselves the right to advise, call to order, and sometimes even to scold, the young tyrants. "Her Majesty's Minister" Mr. Ellery Burwood called himself, and Bee did not hesitate to summon her minister whenever occasion required. Miss Summers was in fact the only person whose friendship with the girls was unmixed with flattery. She was genuinely anxious that they should grow up good and useful women, and insisted that, while they were with her, they should paint, work for the poor, and talk upon rational subjects. "For," as she said, "you *have* brains of your own, children, though you do your best to conceal the fact."

On this particular evening tea was just over, and the scones and strawberries had been done full justice to, before any one remembered Miss Summers' promise of an amusing story.

"Oh, yes! Well," she said in answer to Gladys' reminder, "I thought you'd be amused to hear about my wedding-cake. I never told you about it, did I?"

"Your wedding-cake? Why, you never had one, had you?" questioned Molly, with wide-open eyes.

"To be sure I had. I've no notion of letting married people get all the good things—cake, and presents, and all that, while we unmarried people get none. I didn't mean to stand it, I can tell you! So when I got to an age when one gives up thinking of such things, and settles down to a steady old spinster's life, I thought it was about time that I should give out to my friends that I meant to have a

wedding-day, all by myself—the 24th of June I decided upon, I remember—for it is a good many years ago now. I went out and bought myself a wedding-cake—an excellent one it was; and I had a few friends in to help me eat it, and my dear father and mother and I finished it up at home. A lot of presents came in too—delightful ones, some of them; and all I can say is, that I believe few people have had such a happy wedding-day as I had! There, that's my story. Now let's turn to our work. I want to get ready an outfit for a poor girl going to service, and you must help me."

The girls laughed heartily at the story, and several times laughed again as they sat at their sewing, casting rather puzzled glances at their hostess, who looked the very picture of comfort and well-being; her substantial figure (which had long ago given up all pretence at a waist) ensconced in a large arm-chair, and her bright, happy face bent over her work. At last, when they were putting on their hats to go home, Bee stole up to her and asked timidly: "But don't you feel it rather—rather *flat*, not to be married? I should have thought you must have wanted to be. And yet you can't have, for I know a person like you could have been married plenty of times, if you had liked."

She spoke in an undertone, that the others might not hear, but Miss Summers' answer was audible to all of them.

"Might have been married if I had liked? Yes, certainly, child; I might. But the right man didn't come along; perhaps there never was a right man for me. Those things will come if they are to come; and oh, dear children, if you could only learn to think less about them, and about yourselves altogether! Think of others; try to make *them* happy. That's the best way to be really happy yourselves, depend upon it. Now, good night, my chicks!"

Bee stood for a minute or two looking out of the window, as if suddenly absorbed in a new thought; then she kissed Miss Summers hurriedly, and darted out into the street.

"Come, come, girls!" she exclaimed excitedly. "Let me walk in the middle, I want to tell you something. Miss Summers says we ought to think about making other people happy; and we'll do it—we'll do it!"

"Do it? Do what? How shall we do it?" asked the others eagerly.

"Why, do it for Aunt Julia and Auntie Het—give them a wedding-day! They'll never marry now, poor things; one's thirty-six and the other thirty-five, you know, and they must have given up all thoughts of it. Now's our time! We'll give them a lovely wedding-day; we'll buy them presents; we'll get them that very wedding-cake—oh, lovely! Let's go and buy it now!"

The others were all agog with excitement in a minute, and for a time there was a very Babel of voices. "I only wish we could have provided husbands for the occasion," sighed Gladys, when the first excitement had a little bit toned down. "But of course that's impossible."

"*Gladys!* Of course it is!" said fifteen-year-old Molly, almost indignantly. "Just look at their *age!*"

"I don't know. I have heard of a woman of thirty-five marrying."

"Once in a blue moon. Oh yes, I don't suppose there's anything in the world that never happened," was Bee's wise, if not very lucid, remark.

"Besides, I was looking at a book of Hamerton's the other day," said Olive, "and I particularly noticed his saying that French peasant women were hags at five-and-thirty, the very most attractive age (so he said) in English women."

"When they're married, of course he meant," said Bee decidedly. "Do you know, I've often thought about them—our aunts, I mean—and felt sorry for them," she went on gravely. "Of course they have horridly dull lives now, poor things; and I'm afraid, from what father says, they never had a good time when they were girls, either. Grandfather was poor, or morose, or stingy, or something, and I don't believe they ever saw anybody, so how could they get married? And I'm afraid they'd have liked to be; they don't look very happy as they are, do they? However, they must have given up really thinking of it for years; and this sort of wedding-day will be heaps better than none at all, won't it? We'll begin making out a list of presents at once; mine to Auntie Het shall be a specially nice one, because she was so good to me that time I was ill; when she came and stayed in the house, you know."

"And their wedding-day might be the 24th of June—the same day as Miss Summers'!" cried Molly. "We'll tell dad to dine at his club, because there oughtn't to be any *hes* there, ought there? Let the wedding be at six, and we'll say we are not at home that evening; it'll do Tommy Atkins and Stanley good to spend an evening at home once in a way; and then, after the wedding, we'll have a grand dinner, and wedding-cake—*the* wedding-cake—for dessert!"

II.

THE wedding was fixed for the 24th, as Molly had suggested; and as there was barely a week to make preparations in, the girls set themselves busily to work. But first of all they started off—the whole four of them—to make sure of the brides.

"They hardly ever have any engagements, true," said Bee. "Still, just fancy how awful it would be if, when all the preparations were made, we found they couldn't come!"

The unconscious brides lived in a pretty little cottage in a quiet, old-fashioned part of the town, with a shady garden which ran down to the river. They led a quiet, useful, uneventful life, working in the parish, attending the daily services at the old parish church which lay just across the river, and going into society but little. A greater

contrast to the gay, careless life led by their nieces could hardly be imagined; but they always liked to see that merry quartette of girls, and made them as welcome as they knew how, Miss Hester Mervyn especially.

"I never saw such children as you are; for ever inventing some new plan, and going wild over it," she said laughingly, when her four nieces pounced down upon her on this particular occasion, and, all talking together, at last made her and their Aunt Julia understand that their presence was requested at some high festival, the nature of which was to be kept a profound secret. "What can this mysterious festival be, I wonder? Oh yes, dear, we'll come of course, Aunt Julia and I. But is it an outdoor or indoor affair? What are we to wear, I mean, full evening dress or not?"

Bee and Gladys looked at each other, and Molly afterwards declared that she could see the words "travelling dress" hovering on their lips. Anyhow, Bee said after an instant's pause, "Oh, not evening dress, please; just come in nice high dresses—those dove-coloured ones that you wore on Sunday will be just the thing, won't they, Gladys?"

"And then we'll be all dressed alike—in white, I suppose—for Molly hasn't any dress to match our others," she went on, as they almost danced home. "We shall have to act bridesmaids, you know; and we'll all have bouquets alike—forget-me-nots, I think—no, roses; and the brides shall have those exquisite carnations."

The girls had generally pocket-money enough and to spare, but on this occasion they begged their father for an extra ten-pound note, for there was the wedding-cake to buy, and they were determined that the presents should be really good ones. Gladys and Olive shut themselves up for two days together, for the painting of a handsome screen which they bought in the town; Bee scoured the shops for flower-vases, hand-bags, and various other articles which they had determined to buy; and finally Mr. Burwood was summoned, and commissioned to go to the stores the next day and choose the loveliest little five-o'clock tea-table he could find, also a lady's purse, which must have the initial H engraved upon it.

"And mind it's a very nice one, for it's for me to give," said Molly. "Oh, Bee—oh, Gladys, let's tell him about it; I'm sure he's dying to know!"

"Who wouldn't be, when this tremendous secret is making you all look as if you had the affairs of the nation on your shoulders?" laughed Mr. Burwood, who seemed remarkably complaisant for a busy Q.C. as he was. But Bee spoke at the same moment:

"Molly! I would not dream of telling—a man!" she said, sinking her voice at the last two words; and Molly dropped her eyes, abashed.

"I bow to the Queen Bee. I wouldn't hear the secret for worlds," said Mr. Burwood.

And so the secret was never divulged to any one—not even to Miss

Summers, who, as it happened, was called away to nurse a cousin the very morning after the girls had been to tea with her; and the ordering of the day had to be left to the girls' own unaided wisdom. They felt fully equal to it, however; and when six o'clock came at last, everything was ready.

In the drawing-room the shutters had been shut, and the gas and candles lighted—a perfect blaze of illumination; for, as Bee remarked, it looked more of a festival so. The fire-place was a mass of flowers and ferns artistically arranged by Gladys; the various presents were spread out on two tables, placed on each side—one for Aunt Julia, the other for Auntie Het; and in front of the fire-place, against a background of flowers and ferns, stood the wedding-cake, hidden just now by the screen, which had been finished just in time, by dint of heroic exertions. At the piano sat Olive, her fingers itching to begin the "Wedding March," which she had been practising up for the occasion; Bee and Gladys were flitting about the room, putting little finishing touches to the arrangement of the flowers and the presents; and Molly, all agog with excitement, pranced up and down the hall, now and then peeping in to admonish the cat and dog, whom she had fantastically decked out with flowers, and who were now sitting solemnly on stools by the two tables, as guardians of the presents. "We shall answer the door ourselves, Thomas," she had said; for true to Bee's perception of the fitness of things, no man was to be allowed any share whatever in the proceedings.

Very pretty Molly looked, in her white dress, with a bouquet of pink roses in her hand, and her mantle of golden hair on her shoulders; and so her aunts thought, as, the bell sounding at last, she opened the door to them and bowed them in. Hats and cloaks were soon disposed of, Mr. Mervyn's study having been temporarily fitted up as a dressing-room; and then, having presented each with a lovely bouquet of carnations, Molly ushered them into the brightly-lighted drawing-room, just as Olive was thundering out the first bars of the "Wedding March."

The "brides" looked very well, too, in their pretty dove-coloured dresses; Bee's quick eyes noted that at once, as she led them, with smiles, but no words, to the sofa. "Auntie Het" was pale and quiet-looking, and her dress was quiet to match; but Aunt Julia, who was taller, and had more presence than her sister, wore her dove-colour "with a difference," having little scarlet bows here and there, which seemed to set off the colour in her cheeks. "Aunt Julia looks quite handsome, but I love Auntie Het the best. I am glad I got her the nicest presents," said Bee to herself.

The brilliant light was quite dazzling to eyes fresh from the tender gloom of a grey summer evening; and both ladies looked thoroughly mystified, but amused and expectant at the same time. Nothing could have pleased the girls better; they wanted the whole meaning of the thing to dawn upon the brides gradually.

As soon as Olive's spirited performance of the "Wedding March" had come to an end, Gladys mounted a small rostrum (the programme for the evening had been carefully arranged beforehand); Bee drew back the screen, disclosing the wedding-cake; and Molly seated herself midway between the cat and dog, on a foot-stool which had been placed behind the screen in readiness for her; while Olive remained at the piano, having orders to play soft and appropriate music, as an accompaniment to the speeches to be delivered.

It was not for nothing that Tommy Atkins, Gladys' devoted admirer, had been articled to a solicitor in the town.

"Whereas," she began, with recollections of certain "musty old papers" which she had seen him copying—"Whereas, it hath been pointed out to us that in the lives of certain persons—to wit, unmarried persons—there is often a grievous hardship, viz., that they, unlike their married brethren—sistren, I mean—no, sisters—are debarred from the pleasures, and festivities, and the—the free-will offerings, which are the usual concomitants of the—the drawing together of the bonds of matrimony, it hath seemed good to us to—to——" The effort had been almost too much for her; she hesitated, gasped, and looked helplessly at her sister.

"I'll go on, shall I?" said the self-possessed Bee, jumping up, and giving her a hand to descend. "It was almost my turn, you know; and you've done it awfully well. Now for my part," and with a beaming face she ascended the rostrum. "I can't speak grandly, but this is just how it is," she began. "You see, Aunt Hester and Aunt Julia, Miss Summers was saying to us the other day that she thought it was very hard that unmarried people shouldn't have presents, and a cake, and all that, you know; and that when the time came when she knew she shouldn't be married, she made a wedding-day for herself, and had—oh, such a jolly time! So we thought we'd have one for you; and here is your wedding-cake, and here are your presents—this tableful for you, Aunt Het, and that for Aunt Julia; and we've done everything we can think of to make it nice, and we do hope——"

She suddenly stopped, and the dimpled arm, which had been outstretched, fell helplessly to her side. Aunt Julia had sprung up, and was standing close under the rostrum, red with passion, her cheeks now indeed rivalling the hues of the bows on her dress. "Come down!" she said, laying an imperious hand on Bee's dress. "Come down at once, you rude, impertinent little thing!" And Bee came down, her eyes round with dismay, and her pink cheeks rapidly paling.

It was as though a sudden and appalling thunder-clap had resounded through the room. None of the girls had had the least warning of it, for Bee and Gladys had been engrossed in their own and each other's oratory; Olive had been at the piano; and Molly—poor Molly—was engaged in superhuman efforts to prevent the dog and cat from descending from their pedestals, and making a rush at

each other. So they now stood dazed and mute, as Aunt Julia, almost choking with passion, poured out the torrent of her indignation.

"You are rude, insolent children, all of you! That you should *dare* to insult us so!—it is almost beyond belief—it is quite beyond forgiveness!—yes, Hester, it is, and you know it," for her sister, pale and trembling, had laid a hand on her arm. "Let me speak, pray. These insolent little chits shall not give themselves airs with me, whatever they may do with their friends! I speak as I think; and of all the impudent, ill-bred people that my experience of the world, and my—my age have brought me into contact with, William's children are out and out the worst! Come away, Hester—come away!"

She was close to the door by this time, and marched out, while the girls, with pale, scared faces, stood looking stupidly after her. But the sound of the street door, as she slammed it behind her, roused them, and with one accord they turned to look at their other aunt. "Are you angry, too, Auntie Het?" faltered Bee. "Oh! have we hurt you—have we hurt you?" And when there was no response, save that her eyes filled with tears, they all gave way together, throwing themselves down on chairs and sofas, in the abandonment of their grief.

"I know you meant well, dear children," she said, and would have kissed them; but not a face was lifted, and she could only stroke their bright hair. Then she too went out; and the cat and dog fell to with a will, and fought, and scratched, and bit, unmolested, to the accompaniment of sobs, and deep, heartrending groans.

"Oh! oh!" wailed Molly at last. "When I was a little thing, and had to drink mustard-and-water because I had eaten poisonous berries, I said 'I hated the day, I'd beat the day'; and I wish—I wish I could do it now!"

* * * * * *

Nearly an hour later, the drawing-room door opened, and a tall figure appeared on the threshold; and a pair of keen kindly eyes surveyed the scene with ever growing amazement. The blaze of light, the wedding-cake, the flowers, and the presents—some of which the quick eyes recognised at once—everything seemed to denote high festival, but the strange appearance of the young ladies of the house. Bee was rocking herself to and fro, her dimpled elbows on her knees, and her face buried in her hands; Gladys and Olive were huddled together on the sofa, their arms round each other, and their faces hidden on each other's shoulders; and as for Molly, she had cast herself full length upon the rug. Nobody looked up, and Ellery Burwood's ear caught the sound of muffled sobs.

"What on each is the matter?" he demanded, shutting the door, and coming up close to the woe-begone group. "What has happened? For goodness' sake, tell me; don't keep me in suspense!"

There was genuine alarm in his tone; and whether this amused the girls, or whether it was merely that a certain reaction against their

grief was just setting in, certain it is that they looked up at him for a minute with tear-stained faces, and then burst into uncontrollable laughter, which, however, sounded perilously like sobbing.

"Yes, I'll tell you, I'll tell you!" gasped Bee. All her scruples as to letting any *hes* into the secret had vanished now, in the disastrous overthrow of the cherished scheme.

She began bravely enough; but long before Mr. Burwood had any inkling of the real state of the case, the tide of misery swept over her again, and sobbing out "You go on, Gladys; I can't," she buried her face in her hands, and began rocking to and fro once more. So Gladys had to go on; and she, bravely struggling with both laughter and tears, and clinging to Olive's arm for support, managed to give a fairly intelligible account of the whole affair; while Ellery Burwood settled himself to listen, and, if need be, to cross-examine, his hands in his pockets, and his keen humorous eyes (there was not much anxiety in them now) fixed on Gladys' downcast face.

Suddenly, however, there came a change. He started, wheeled round, and finally almost turned his back upon Gladys, making Molly, whose face had still been hidden in the rug, rear her head, and dart a quick glance at him. What she saw made her give a hasty pinch to Bee's foot, and from that minute the two watched him as though fascinated. He was perfectly unconscious of their gaze. A sudden and deep flush had suffused his usually pale face; his lips, which were so firm and even compressed, were trembling; and his eyes—so Molly afterwards declared—were liquid with tears. As Gladys finished her story with, "Oh, we never meant to hurt them; you know we couldn't have meant to hurt them!" he seemed to pull himself together with a great effort, and turned round again, pale as ever, but with a strange gleam in his eyes which struck her at once. What was it? Not anger, for he said quickly, but very kindly, "I know, I know! you would none of you hurt a fly if you knew it. But—good heavens!"—here he flushed again, even more deeply than before, and seemed to struggle with words that would come whether he liked it or no—"the idea of thinking that a woman of five-and-thirty has lost all her attractions!" Then he, too, made for the door, and, like the two "brides," was seen no more that night.

Shock number two. But far from being a knock-down blow, as was the first, this second shock brought all the girls to their feet in breathless excitement. "Olive!" "Bee!" "Gladys—oh Gladys!" was all they could ejaculate for a minute or two; then the three rushed into each other's arms, and Bee exclaimed, "Which, oh which is it? 'Five-and-thirty,' he said; but how should he know? Does he—can he——Oh, what a wonderful, wonderful day!"

While Molly skipped wildly round the room, and then fell on her knees before the cake. "Dear, dear wedding-cake!" she cried, hugging it in her arms. "You may be wanted after all—I do believe you will be!"

III.

When Miss Hester Mervyn left her nieces' house, she went straight home to the little cottage by the river-side. She did not much expect to find her sister there, thinking it probable that she would "walk her temper off"—a plan which Miss Julia Mervyn not infrequently tried, and which generally had a very good effect. In all likelihood she was trying it now; at any rate, she had not come in; and after taking off her bonnet and cloak, Hester Mervyn came down to the little sitting-room, dropped wearily into a chair, and began to think.

And her thoughts were very sad ones. As her young nieces had divined, she had led a very colourless life. Her parents had been not only poor, but strongly Puritan in their notions, keeping their two daughters very strictly to their needlework and their various household duties, and seeming to have no idea that young things wanted amusements, or companions of their own age. So girlhood came and went, without having ever brought any young lovers, or even friends, to them; and Hester, who had plenty of romantic ideas of her own—as what girl has not?—found nothing for them to feed on. Moreover, she was of a deeply affectionate, self-sacrificing nature; her heart craved for love, and yet more for some one upon whom to pour out the treasures of her own love; she adored little children, and would fain have had some of her very own to tend and care for, as any one must have known who saw the wistful look that would come into her eyes as she watched a mother and child together. If she dreamed—if she still dreamed—of such happiness being yet one day hers, who can blame her? She was not young, she was not beautiful—she knew that well enough—but the heart knoweth its own tenderness as well as its own bitterness, and finds it hard sometimes to realise that that tenderness may never find full scope, full expression.

So it was that this evening's events had been a sudden and most painful shock to her, bringing light to her mind, but darkness into her soul. That she had cherished any dreams, she had hardly known until to-night; now she had been made to see herself as others saw her, and to acknowledge, what she ought (so she told herself) to have acknowledged long ago—that those dreams must be banished for ever. It was a heavy blow, coming as it did without any warning; and sitting down at the little table in the window, she wept quietly but very bitterly, mourning for the hopes that were no more. "They say that every dog has his day," she said to herself at last with a sad little smile. "That is not true. I have never had my day, and I never shall."

There was a quick impatient rap at the door, and the next minute the little maid-servant ushered in a gentleman. Hester rose mechanically to meet him, hardly seeing who it was in the gathering gloom.

Ellery Burwood had hurried away from his amazed young friends with his brain, like his face, on fire. "Oh, the insolence of youth—the insolence of youth!" he muttered to himself as he shut the street door after him; then he thought no more of them, being lost in wonder at his own feelings. He had had no conception, until that night, that Hester Mervyn was anything, or ever would be anything, to him. He had often met her at her brother's house; he had noticed her quiet gentle ways,—the tenderness with which she nursed Bee in her long illness, the sweetness of the rather sad mouth, the wistfulness of the grave, deep-set eyes. "A sweet-natured, gentle-souled woman," he had said to himself once or twice; then she went back to her little cottage home; and what with the rush of business, and the pleasant distractions to be found at his friend's house and elsewhere, he had thought no more of her. Now, however, came to him a sudden revelation both of himself and of her—of her, with her tender, sensitive spirit—of himself, possessed with deep and reverent admiration for her, an admiration that at a word would spring into love—nay, that had sprung into it already.

"Blind fool that I was!" he exclaimed, in bitter wrath with himself. "And she—she is suffering now, and I might perhaps have spared her!"

He had hurried on, only half conscious where his steps were taking him; now he found himself outside the cottage. He paused but a moment, then knocked at the door, as we have seen.

Miss Mervyn was in, and alone, the servant said; and before Hester rose, he had time to see the sad, sweet face, with its traces of recently shed tears. He could not begin quietly. "Miss Mervyn—Hester," he burst out as soon as the door was shut, "I have come to tell you—to ask you—you will let me speak—you will not send me away?"

Then Hester listened to the story she had thought but now that she was never to hear; her sweet, grave eyes dilating, first with keen amazement (for she had never dreamt, sweet modest soul, that any friend of her charming young nieces could ever spare even a glance for her) then with the dawning of a new-found joy. "I think—I think—" she murmured, in answer to his eager questionings. "But oh! you must give me time—time to think; it is all so strange."

"I will, I will, my darling," he said, with tender consideration for her bewilderment; and Hester leaned her face on her hands and tried to think it all over. Suddenly she looked up at him. "Have you been there? Did you hear anything about this evening?" she asked breathlessly.

"I did."

It was Hester's turn to flush now. She rose and went to the window, standing there with bent head, and hands tightly clasped. The river was discoursing sweet murmurous music as it flowed softly past in the twilight; but she heard nothing but the quick surging of the blood as it rose in waves to her brain. "Oh, go away, pray go

away!" she said at last, in an agony of shame. But, instead of obeying, he came up close to her and took her clasped hands in his.

"Hester—my Hester—do you think it was *pity?* Look at me! Are you so bad a judge of expression as that?"

* * * * * *

So the wedding-cake was wanted after all; Ellery Burwood said he would have no other. And Bee was not the first of the family to be married, either; but she and her sisters made a charming quartette of bridesmaids to "Auntie Het," and enjoyed the wedding-day immensely.

"Out of evil comes good," said Bee sententiously, as, the guests all gone, they surveyed the remnants of the cake. "We made dreadful little asses of ourselves that day; I feel quite hot even now when I think of it. Still, who knows but what Auntie Het might never have had a wedding-cake at all if it hadn't been for us?"

"THE HARVEST NOW IS GATHERED IN."

Hey, for the wealth of the harvest weather,
When all shall be faithfully garnered in!
For that we have sown we shall surely gather—
The gold for the goodly, the ruth for sin.

Every season its birthright knoweth—
The seedling planted in vernal spring
Through the summer in silence groweth,
While callow nestlings find voice and sing.

On we go, by the wayside sowing,
Broadcast sowing with open hand;
Ever behind us, springing and growing,
"A cloud of witnesses" hide the land.

Aye, but heed we the seed in planting?
Sow we in patience, and till the ground?
Ask we, when grown will the seed be wanting
In fulness and soundness, or worthy found?

Swift in our hearts is the harvest springing,
Side by side grow the wheat and tares,
And ever there cometh an autumn, bringing
Tears and laughter, and joys and cares.

Sow, O, friend, as the years speed o'er you,
Sow good seed with an open hand;
Sow; the promise lies clear before you;
You'll reap the fruit in God's Harvest Land!

Helen Marion Burnside.

SOCIABILITY OF SQUIRRELS.

MY first acquaintance with this agreeable quality in the agile, graceful creatures, darting from bough to bough in our English woods, was made when I was staying at a beautiful country house in Devonshire. I used often to sit very quietly sketching under the fine old trees, and the squirrels would come to the end of an overhanging bough, and watch my proceedings with apparent interest.

As I do not understand their dialect, I cannot say what might be their opinion of my performances, but they chatted very merrily, seeming glad to welcome an intruder on their solitude.

For many years our own home was in the middle of a pine-wood, and there a much more intimate friendship was formed with the squirrels. Our gardener found a young one caught in a net in the strawberry bed, and brought it to me. It was kept for some time in a squirrel-cage, where it seemed tolerably contented; but we were not happy about our small captive. Accidentally, or purposely, the door was left open, and we were glad when it regained its liberty.

A day or two afterwards, a young lady who was staying in the house told us that our squirrel had run up to her in the gravel walk; and next morning Charlie made his appearance at the dining-room window. His visits were repeated for several days. No attempt was made to capture him. He ran about the room as if in search of something; and at last jumped on a canary's cage which hung in the window.

"I believe he is looking for his own old home," I said. And immediately upon my fetching it from the loft where it had been put away, Charlie ran in, and gave himself a swing on the roller, and ate the nuts we placed in the tray.

It is to be supposed that Charlie told his friends that we were lovers of animals, and might be trusted; for other squirrels frequently visited us, in the house and in the grounds. Those were the happy days—for quiet country ladies—of croquet-playing; and we had a levelled ground in a part of the fir-wood, near the garden, where we often spent the summer afternoons. There the squirrels were quite at home, and would run up our mallets, and sit upon our shoulders, or even on the crowns of our hats.

Some of our visitors they made acquaintance with immediately, others they always avoided. A little toy-terrier, with a bell attached to its collar, which the cunning little creature used to try to silence, that it might steal upon our favourites unheard, was their peculiar aversion; but our own pet Skye, St. Barbe, would let them climb over his back, and frolic about him without stirring an inch.

Mrs. Brightwen in her admirable volume, 'Wild Nature tamed by

Kindness,' is quite right in affirming that quietness is the great conciliator of animals. An abrupt gesture will at once startle and drive them away; but if you sit still they will gain confidence, and come nearer and nearer, till they learn to feed out of your hand, to nestle in the folds of your dress, and even to search in your pockets for nuts and crusts of bread which they know you often carry about with you.

One of my sisters, who was particularly gentle in voice and manner, and very fond of animals, exercised a peculiar charm over the squirrels. She often got up at five o'clock to feed them, when they pattered across the verandah to her window; and she always kept a store of food for them. A china jar of nuts stood on the mantel-piece, and she more than once remarked on its becoming mysteriously empty. At last it was discovered that the squirrels came into the room, lifted off the lid, and helped themselves without breaking the fragile ornament.

We kept a good many fowls—bantams and half-bantams—which had a fancy for roosting in the fir-trees, and one of the hens would persist in laying her eggs in a squirrel's nest. This was carrying sociability too far, and the squirrel got into a rage and danced round it until the eggs were removed.

It often amused us to see the hens teaching the little chickens to climb the trees, and gathering them under their wings on quite a slender bough. We used to put sticks and twigs to aid the youngsters in their ascent.

The window where the squirrel's cage stood was also a favourite resort of our hens, who always brought their young broods there, and often came to be fed. They did not approve of the squirrels, and would gather in a circle round one of them, on the lawn, attracting us to the windows by their furious and noisy cackling.

Charlie would remain quite still till the circle had gradually drawn closer; then, with a sudden spring, would jump high over their heads, and in another moment be chattering at them from the boughs of a magnificent ilex tree, in which he and his friends greatly delighted.

That wide verandah supported by rough, unpainted pine trunks finally cost us the loss of our company of squirrels. The poles grew rotten, and had to be replaced. It was a very noisy, tedious operation, nearly overcoming our own patience, and quite tiring out that of our wild little pets. Perhaps the workmen teased or frightened them. They never afterwards renewed their visits.

Quite a growth of nut bushes threatened to grow up on the lawn, where they buried their spoil. They always secreted a few when fed, and carried them away. I suppose they forgot where they were hidden, for in all parts of the grounds tiny trees sprang up, where, certainly, they had never been planted by human hands.

The gamekeepers from a neighbouring estate came purposely to see our squirrels, and went away satisfied with the truth of their master's report of the tameness to which they had been brought by the exercise

of sympathy, discretion, and the total absence of restraint and coercion.

We used to amuse ourselves picking up cones and sticks in the fir-wood, and the squirrels would come and chatter and laugh in the tree-tops, flinging down in sport, or to help us, large fir-cones, which in spring and autumn we loved to see sparkle on our hearths, emitting a sweet, wholesome fragrance.

Probably those sharp teeth did not improve the trees by robbing them of their young shoots; but, after all, the pine woods were so plentiful, and the trees were often twisted and scathed, and not worth the trouble of being carted away, when felled by south-westerly gales, so we never grudged the squirrels their merry play.

The son of St. Barbe, the dog who was so friendly with our squirrels, could not bear them, and used to try to climb trees in pursuit of them. Rough was also naturally averse to cats, but formed such a friendship with one of ours and her progeny that, unless the kittens were sent too far away, he would fetch them back.

Once our maids could not get the dog to move from the root of a fir-tree, half way between Heathside and Parkstone, until he had coaxed down one of these kittens, which had been given away, and was lying hidden among the branches, where it had taken refuge after trying to find its way to its birthplace.

Rough persisted in his solicitations until they were crowned with complete success. Then, after kissing each other, the affectionate couple walked home side by side contentedly. The mother cat was often seen "kissing with patient love the stone that marks his burial-ground;" and mournfully prowling round the spot just above the croquet lawn, where our first favourite, the Heathside dog, was laid.

Nature vindicates herself, and Providence rebukes man's feeble judgment. If you feed the wild birds well, they will not be such pilferers of your seeds and fruits, and they will clear your shrubs and trees of their deadlier insect foes. The always harmonious sounds which haunt our hills and groves will give us sweeter melody than hired musicians. But the miscalled "Dumb Animals" can speak for themselves.

"List to our hundred voices heard by mount, and stream, and rill,
The thousand mingled tones that rise above the distant hill.
* * * * * *

We ask no subtle orators to plead in our great cause,
We take it from your judgment halls, we bow not to your laws;
High in the heavens our voice is heard, there judgment shall be given,
The Lord of man and beast presides in the great court of heaven!
* * * * * *

That great immortal Father Who sees the sparrow fall,
In Whose kind ear our separate tones form one harmonious call,
Who knows the wants and feels the woes of every living thing,
From the spider on the dungeon-wall to the forests' mighty king."

ROSA MACKENZIE KETTLE.

A BALCONY AT LUCERNE.

By W. W. Fenn.

THOSE who remember Lucerne five-and-twenty years ago will know it to have been one of the most romantic and picturesque of Swiss towns. However modernized it may have become, the mighty mountains surrounding it, near or remote, are indestructible; and to some extent the same may be said of the many towers, ancient buildings, and walls marking its antiquity. The venerable covered wooden bridge, too, was a conspicuous feature at the time of which I speak, and before the grand new one threw it into the shade, it used to offer to me a delightful loitering place of an evening. I spent many an hour there, especially when, to the artist's eye, the effects of moonlight lent it an additional charm.

I was staying in rooms not far off in one of the houses overhanging the rushing river Reuss, where it first narrows into its channel after leaving the broad and lovely lake. There was quite a Venetian aspect about this bit of the town, and the numerous balconies, one above another, with which many of the houses were adorned, increased the similarity. My room opened out on to one of these, high up, and from it I could look down upon those, wider and broader, belonging to the rooms beneath me.

The season was midsummer, the tourists had not arrived in force, the weather was fine, and all was favourable to the artistic mission which led me to the place. When the day's work was over, either the bridge or my own balcony offered delightfully suggestive retreats well suited to the meditative, fanciful reveries into which a painter's mind loves to relapse. Nothing was lacking but the occasional companionship of some sympathetic soul—woman's or man's. The former preferable, perhaps, but not necessarily, for I was never very susceptible, as the phrase goes, and unless she should chance to be thoroughly after the ideal of my own heart—or brain, more properly speaking—I felt fairly contented with my solitude.

Such a "dream-being," however, was not likely to cross my path; and yet I had beheld some one flitting hither and thither at times, whose outward aspect might have warranted the hope of her possessing sympathies and tastes akin to my own. I do not pretend to draw a word-picture of her; let it suffice that if mere appearance had been all in all, she would have more than satisfied my aspirations.

I was making several drawings under and about the bridge, and as the shades of evening fell, I had frequently seen her taking her way across the old wooden pile, as if returning from some regular occupation. She was no mere workwoman, however; and, though a foreigner,

evidently not a Swiss, I could have been sworn. Not perhaps either quite a lady, taking the word as vulgarly interpreted. Speculation ran high about her; but it was more than a fortnight after the first glimpse ere I discovered that she actually lived in the rooms immediately under mine.

One warm night, when the moon was streaming over the Venetian canal-like avenue made by the houses on either bank of the river, I was sitting smoking a cigar in my balcony, when voices coming from that immediately underneath attracted my attention—a man's and a woman's speaking in Italian. Looking down, I saw their figures, and after a moment her face—the face I knew so well, and had admired so much. It was the first really hot evening we had had, and she wore nothing over her head but a lace mantilla. Only very indistinctly could I catch the purport of their talk, for the monotonous roar of the Reuss drowned most sounds not loud—and their voices were far from that.

I did not wish to listen either, though I could not help watching. Nor, indeed, after a minute, could I help getting unmistakable evidence that he was urging an unwelcome suit upon her. His action, too, was unmistakable. More than once he tried to take her hand; and when, after much resistance on her part, he at last held it for a moment, he bent his lips towards it; ere they could touch it, however, she snatched it away, to his evident annoyance. In fact, throughout he seemed greatly angered by her rejection of his overtures, and this last act of hers brought his rage to a climax. I plainly heard him mutter an oath, and then, as he retreated from the balcony into the room I heard him in louder tones swear to be revenged.

She remained outside after he had disappeared, and a moment or two later the resounding clang of a closing door, coming up the common stairway of the house, told me he had left her apartments.

Should I know him again?

Yes, I thought so. His tall, lithe, agile figure had a character in it very distinguishable from the stoutish, thick-set, male population of the Swiss town.

When he was gone, she lingered motionless, exactly where he left her, and in the same attitude, her cheek resting on the hand of the arm which leaned on the top rail of the iron balcony. The moon fell with a clear, soft gleam upon her face; and though that was not strictly beautiful as to the features, it had a nameless charm for me—greater than ever now.

Would you expect a solitary bachelor to have done anything else than look and long? To disturb her by so much as the faintest noise even would have been sacrilege. I waited and watched. Like a statue she stood for, I should guess, nearly an hour, her full weight, as it seemed, resting upon that bar of iron. Then, on a sudden, this delightful vision vanished, the window was closed with a snap, and I was left with more than my usual pabulum for reflection.

* * * * *

Was it four nights or four hours later that this scene was reproduced?

That I shall never know; but it was reproduced, I will swear, all—to the smallest detail—as I have described it, and with the full consciousness on my part, whilst gazing, that it had all happened before, and that this was the second time I had witnessed the strange interview. For this reason I use the word "reproduced" advisedly. There I was in the balcony, and there were the man and woman in the lower one again. You may hint that I am a dreamer, that this was the result of the imaginative side of the artistic faculties, and that it was absurd to suppose the same identical circumstance, in all respects, would occur as it had done before. I can only insist it was not the first time I had seen it.

Well, anyway, there I sat, on this second occasion, long after the lady had retired into her room, long after the whole town was hushed in the quiet of sleep, and long after the moon had dipped below the opposite houses, throwing the whole course of the river into the deepest gloom. Below, no sound or sign of movement, save the rush of the Reuss; above, pale, trembling stars, here and there, ever and anon obscured by fleecy yet accumulating clouds; but for the water, absolute silence everywhere, and not a light visible in any window.

Far into the night my meditations carried me. The early summer dawn perhaps might have been evident, but for the change coming over the sky. Then, at last, a faint noise right underneath where I sat, as of some one moving very irregularly, clambering as it were, upon a quite low-down balcony. Yes, clambering up the iron-work certainly—that was it!—and getting every moment a little nearer, a little higher up—very faint now and then, but louder at each recurrence.

I bent down to look, but seeing was out of the question in that thick darkness. Ears, however, are frequently more useful than eyes. They were so in this case, for by accurate and intense listening, I discovered what was going on.

A footstep had reached and planted itself in the lady's balcony directly beneath mine. Soon there arose plainly to my acute sense of hearing, a little grating noise, with a pause in it once or twice at first, but afterwards for a considerable time. It was a little sawing noise, the grating of a file upon the iron-work! Remember, I could see nothing, and could only catch these sounds very indistinctly amidst the din and hum of the waters. But their meaning to me was not indistinct; that flashed into my mind very soon; I strung it all together in a moment. Some one was filing away the upper bar on which that unknown being had rested her fair arm and hand, and that "some one," beyond a doubt, was the vengeful rejected suitor.

To swing myself over my balcony and to descend to hers by one of the upright supports which connected them, and then and there confront the villain at his diabolical work, was an irresistible impulse.

But I was powerless to move; the hand stretched out in front of me, as I lay with my ear close down to the open-work at the edge of the balustrade, had become entangled in the decorative fretwork, and I could not withdraw my wrist. A sharp-pointed, spike-like ornament pierced the flesh as I strove to rise. An agony of mind and body overcoming me, with a wrench and an irresistible groan of pain I, at last, freed my arm to find myself—in bed!

* * * * * *

Had it all been a dream then—the whole affair, my first experience no less than the second? No, I could not, would not credit an hypothesis so humiliating, so absurd!

Springing out of bed, and going to the window, plainly discernible now through the obscurity of the room by reason of the summer dawn, I stepped on to the balcony, to find everything as quiet as the grave. The Swiss are an early people, but they scarcely begin to stir so soon as three in the morning, and that hour rang out from a neighbouring church clock whilst I gazed. A matter-of-fact man would have shrugged his shoulders, apostrophised himself as an ass, and gone back to bed with the conviction that his supper had disagreed with him. The apostrophe might have been deserved in this case, but the conviction which rose in my mind was of a different character. I was convinced, as thoroughly as I ever was of anything in my life, that the scene I had witnessed was a reality and no dream; that the filing sound I had heard was no distempered nervous grating in the brain, and that the wrench and struggle by which I freed my imprisoned hand was no distorted mental effort born of mysterious nightmare. In proof whereof, behold my wrist, scored, wounded, and bleeding still!

I partially dressed myself. My limbs at least were free, and there was nothing to prevent me from descending to that lower balcony as I had proposed in my dre——

What am I saying? You will laugh, and think I have committed myself. Not at all. Two minutes more saw me carrying out my purpose. It offered little mechanical difficulty. The whole fabric of the light ornamental iron-work composing the balconies from the highest to the lowest was connected by upright supports running from one to the other. Agile, active, and strong as I was in those days, I soon contrived, without danger, to slide down one of the thin iron columns, to find myself on *her* balcony, in front of her window.

Before turning to the object which had really led me to take this step, I could not help peeping in through the closed, but only partially-curtained, French casement. A faint light was burning, sufficient dimly to reveal the interior, and to show me the occupant asleep upon her couch. A flickering ray fell upon her fair cheek, and the loosened tresses of her luxuriant bronze-toned hair straying upon her pillow. One hand and arm, freed from clothing, lay extended over the coverlet, supine, motionless, and pure as alabaster. I could have gazed at the

fair picture in rapt delight for many a minute, had I not been recalled by such sense of honour as I possessed to the recollection of the purpose I had in view. But for this purpose there could have been no warrant for the intrusion I was making on her privacy.

To turn my back upon the window cost me an effort; but resolution is said to be a valuable and commendable quality in man, if not in woman; and I think and hope I am gifted with a fair share of it. By its aid I bent my attention to an examination of the top rail of the balustrade. In the centre one long bar extended between the two upright pillars, down one of which I had descended. Against the corroded rusty end impinging on this it was that she had leant for such a length of time—the night before?—well, Heaven knows! Whenever it was it seemed that it could not have been long since; I do not know. But this I know, that as I peered down on the end of that iron bar, I discovered by the fast increasing daylight that it had been filed almost through!—filed I must call it, but the separation in a similar bar of wood would have looked as if it had been sawn—to within the eighth of an inch of separation.

Below this rail there was a space of more than a foot ere any firm protection to the balcony existed. The result to any one resting their weight inadvertently on the upper bar therefore became instantly obvious. It would have snapped like matchwood, and no earthly power could have saved one from being precipitated headlong from this fearful height into the tearing river!

This was the scoundrel's trap, set with diabolical cunning; and there, hard by, lay his intended victim, sleeping calmly, and little recking of the peril in which the villain had placed her; dreaming, perchance, some delightful dream, as her half-parted, half-smiling lips suggested. Yes; but surely you will not tell me that I too had been dreaming?

Before swarming up to my own domain again, two things had to be done—first, to examine the other and farther end of the iron bar; secondly, to warn the unconscious sleeper of her danger, or, at least, make it apparent by some means. Both terminations had been treated alike, as I expected to find, except that the cut in the other was not quite so deep; otherwise it might have yielded to the pressure of her resting, trustful arms too soon. This fact, however, defeated its own object, for it yielded to my by no means trustful arms and hands; and, with but a slight wrench, I broke it off, and removed it entirely, leaving the front of the balcony quite unprotected.

It had not taken me long to decide on this course of action, for although I am a meditative, slow, easy-going fellow by nature, I have, when called upon by emergency to act, a knack of doing so promptly. With the treacherous bar removed entirely, the danger was removed also, for no one could approach the window without seeing the gap, much less step on to the balcony.

So then, placing the piece of iron conspicuously and half-upright

against some of the fretwork, and taking one momentary and final peep at the sleeping beauty, I scaled the column again and was soon back on my own floor. But it was broad daylight by this time, and the question arose—had I been observed?

* * * * *

Broad daylight? Yes, but a dull, grey, leaden daylight, without a tinge of the "russet-mantled morn" anywhere visible. A chill and fitful wind swept down from the direction of the lake, and one or two pattering drops of heavy rain were falling now and again. Storm-forging Pilatus had set his bellows to work, and the blows on his anvil were beginning to resound in distant peals of muttering thunder. The oppressive heat of the preceding evening presaged this, but the actual brewing of the tempest took place with magical quickness. Sometimes the grim mountain monster has a knack of turning out such specimens of his weird skill with amazing rapidity; and ere I had been five minutes in my room, he had completed his handiwork. Violent floods of rain descended; the sudden hurricane set lattice and *jalousie* creaking and banging; incessant flashes of vivid lightning flushed the atmosphere, now again almost as dark as night; and the "dread, rattling thunder" seemed to shake the very foundations of the earth. In a moment one terrific crash just overhead appeared to strike the house, and caused me involuntarily to close and retreat from the window.

As I looked out again after a minute, I saw that, indeed, a bolt must have fallen and struck some of the ironwork of these balconies. One of the columns rising to the topmost floor was twisted, seared, melted almost at its base where it passed out of sight. The rain, however, continuing to pour incessantly, I could not satisfy my curiosity by stepping outside to see how far the mischief extended, but I felt that something more serious had happened below, and the rain went on in a continuous deluge literally for hours. I heard its never-ceasing downpour long after I had thrown myself upon the bed, tired and fevered, and I heard it still going on, when, after a heavy sleep, I awoke, to find by my watch it was past noon.

Sleeping again, you will say; of course the whole affair is a dream and nothing else.

Wait a little, we shall see.

Some commotion was taking place in the house. Hurrying footsteps and quick-speaking voices reached my ear from below stairs, and going some way down, I hailed the *concierge*, who was amongst the group of people gathered on the lower landing. He came up to me, with a pale face and scared eyes.

"Monsieur has not heard?" he exclaimed. "Ah, no! Indeed, then, monsieur must have been sleeping soundly. A terrible calamity has happened—the lightning has struck Madame's balcony here on the *quatrième*, and demolished it. How its remains hold together still is a marvel; most of it has fallen and the rest must soon follow."

"Madame is not hurt, I hope?" I asked anxiously.

"No, by God's mercy, no one is hurt!" he answered. "And now that the storm has abated, workmen will arrive to repair and prevent farther danger. But monsieur will be well advised not to trust himself on his own balcony. It has no support from below at one end—one of the columns has disappeared.

This was the fact, and with the destruction of the ironwork had disappeared the evidence of what I had done to save the lady from falling into that trap set by the rejected suitor.

Once more, you will say, here is further proof that I had been dreaming. I can show you nothing to the contrary, you will declare. Perhaps not, but the lady was no dream, for I saw her twice again—the next day and the next.

And the next was for the last time, for when I last looked on that fair face and form, it was lying stretched out on some planks in the shed which, at Lucerne, did duty for the morgue, dead! Drowned? Yes, recovered from the lake, but not drowned to death, as a deep wound from the blade of a poignard, in the region of the heart, only too plainly testified.

Some peasants that same day, towards nightfall, had seen the body floating near the town, and pushing out in a boat, had brought it ashore. No suspicion of foul play was at first aroused, but a little later a man was observed on the bank by a gendarme, washing a long knife stained with blood. This circumstance, in conjunction with the discovery of the poor woman, which of course had caused great excitement throughout the community, led to his apprehension, and as I was leaving the shed, I met the prisoner being taken to the place, under a strong guard, in order to confront him with the victim—a customary proceeding according to the Continental system of criminal investigation. One glance at the accused was sufficient for me: I immediately recognized the tall, lithe Italian!

Some six months later he was executed at Berne.

ESTHER WAS SUMMONED.

[*Frontispiece.*

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER, 1892.

A GUILTY SILENCE.

CHAPTER XLV

MARGARET AND ESTHER.

THE first month after her return from her wedding-tour was to Margaret Bruhn a time full of anguish and soul-wearing anxiety. She had a double burden to bear. There was, first, the imprisonment of Esther Sarel, and next, the strange disappearance of Trix. Her trouble, as regarded Esther, was a secret one which she was obliged to hide carefully even from those she loved best. Her trouble, as regarded her sister, was one which her husband and father could share with her, and the listless melancholy and sad pre-occupation of manner to which Margaret was a prey at this time, were thus naturally accounted for.

A week after her first visit, Margaret went to Ackworthing again, and again she was permitted to see Esther alone. Mr. Davenant accompanied her on this second visit, and condescended to partake of the governor's dry sherry, and to entertain that gentleman with some reminiscences of polite society, during the time his daughter was closeted with the prisoner.

Margaret's second interview with Esther was of a less painful character than her first one. The conditions of the case were known to her. She had tacitly agreed to accept circumstances as they were; to allow Esther to accomplish the sacrifice which she had initiated of her own free will; to enact the unheroic part, and leave to another the buskin in which she herself was afraid to tread. Esther was her scapegoat, who had gone out into the wilderness to perish, while she remained in her tent beneath the palms.

At that second interview, Esther was by much the more cheerful of the two. It was she who consoled and strengthened Margaret, whose humiliation of soul was extreme. Margaret, with her head resting on Esther's shoulder, wept many bitter tears. All Esther's tears seemed to have been shed long ago. There was about her manner now a serenity and elevation which made her seem quite a

different person from the Esther of old times, and lifted her, morally, to a height that made her Margaret's superior. And Margaret felt the superiority, although Esther might not, and knew that the intangible something she had forfeited could never be hers again.

But a fortnight was now wanting to complete the term of Esther's imprisonment. It was arranged that Mrs. Bruhn should meet her outside the prison gates at ten o'clock on the morning of her release. Margaret was already in negotiation with certain friends of hers with the view of obtaining a situation for Esther as soon as she should be at liberty, for Esther would not go back to Helsingham, although Mrs. Bruhn would gladly have taken her into her own house.

"I could not bear it, Miss Margaret," Esther said. "I could not bear to go back to the old place, at least not just yet awhile. It will be far better for me to go among strangers who will never know that I have been in prison. Then again, Mr. Bruhn might not like to have me in his house; and I should be looked down upon by the other servants, and all your kindness could hardly save me from being insulted twenty times a day. No—I will go away, please—a long way off, where I shall never see a face that I have known before."

As Esther wished, so it was arranged, and the situation was ready for her on the day of her release. It was in a quiet country town nearly a hundred miles from Helsingham, and with a family on whose kindness and consideration for those under them Margaret could thoroughly rely.

Margaret longed for the morning of Esther's release even more than Esther herself did. When Esther's imprisonment should have become a thing of the past, Mrs. Bruhn thought that her conscience would probably cease to trouble her so frequently; that as time went on, her feeling of self-abasement would become less acute; that inward peace, and even happiness, might be hers again in years to come. When Esther should be at liberty, the penalty demanded by society would have been paid in full, and in no possible way could her crime be brought home to her. The matter would then rest entirely between herself and Esther, and if Esther were satisfied, who else in all the wide world had any right or reason to complain?

When the wished-for morning arrived, Margaret was driven over to Ackworthing by her father, and reached that town a full hour earlier than was needful. Leaving Mr. Davenant to his own devices, she hired a cab, and waited inside it, close by the prison gates, till the clock struck ten, and Esther Sarel issued forth. Esther's first glance round showed her Mrs. Bruhn beckoning to her from the cab window. Margaret kissed her as tenderly as though Esther had been her own sister when the latter got into the cab.

"Thank Heaven! this day has come at last!" cried Mrs. Bruhn fervently, as she held Esther's hand tight within her own. "Ah

child, the suffering has not been all on your side. Even cowards have consciences that can sting shrewdly at times."

They drove to an hotel, where Margaret had ordered breakfast in a private room.

"Miss Margaret," said Esther, when the servant had brought in the tray and left the room, "I was your servant once on a time, not very long ago. It will seem to bring back the old days if you will let me wait on you just once again as I used to do."

"You wait on me, Esther! It is I who ought to wait on you. You are my guest this morning—pray understand that. And both now and for ever you are my friend—the one who has done and suffered more for me than all my other friends put together. Sit; and this morning it shall be I who will wait upon you."

Esther's further protests were useless; Margaret would have her own way in the matter; but neither of them had much appetite for breakfast, and the meal was quickly over. When the table was cleared, they drew their chairs close up to the fire, for the weather was bitterly cold, and they had many things to say to each other.

"Esther, did you have any message from, or hear anything of Silas Ringe while you were in prison?" asked Margaret presently, almost in a whisper.

"No, Miss Margaret; he has been as far removed from me as if he were dead," answered Esther, while a slight flush mounted to her face. "Indeed, I have come to regard him in my thoughts as though the silence of the grave were really set between us. Silas chose to leave me, and I could not call him back. But I think there are worse things in life than losing those we love, whether it be by death or desertion. When I saw before me what I thought was my duty, I determined to do it, however hard it might be. If I had let it go by without heeding, and had afterwards married Silas, I could never, never have been happy."

"Would that we could all think as you think, and cling to duty as our greatest earthly good!" cried Margaret in tones of infinite sadness.

"I will confess to you, Miss Margaret, that Silas's desertion of me (though I could not blame him for doing as he did) seemed to me harder to bear than anything else. It seemed to me that if I had only had his love to uphold me, everything else would have been easy to bear. But it was not to be. In prison I had much time for thought, for working these things out in my own mind; and by-and-by, after a long struggle, I began to see more clearly, and to feel and know the blessed truth that all things work together for our good. Then, little by little, a great peace seemed to settle down over my heart, and I could bear to think calmly and lovingly of Silas as of one whom I should never see again in this world, but whom I might hope to see elsewhere, when our hearts shall be purged of all earthly passions, and filled only with that divine and ineffable love, whose source and origin is God."

About two o'clock, according to arrangement, Mr. Davenant arrived at the hotel with the wagonette, and Margaret and Esther were driven by him to the Monkwell station, where Esther's little luggage, which had been sent from Miss Easterbrook's, was awaiting her. The two women walked the little platform arm-in-arm till the arrival of the train. Then Margaret threw up her veil and kissed Esther with tears in her eyes; and Esther, smiling pensively, gently returned the kiss.

"Heaven bless you, and have you ever in its safe keeping, dear Miss Margaret!" she said; and then Mr. Davenant, with kindly officiousness, hustled Esther into the train, and in another minute she was gone.

Mrs. Bruhn went back to Helsingham, sad at heart, but with a burden of care lifted off her mind. She seemed to breathe more freely than she had done from the moment she heard of Esther's imprisonment. Surely now, at last, that wretched business of the stolen letter would be allowed to sleep. It had been expiated in full, and ought now to be buried out of sight for ever. That other great source of trouble arising from the unaccountable disappearance of her sister was still left her, and it was a trouble that made itself felt more poignantly from day to day, as the prospect of Trix's return or recovery seemed to grow more remote. However, as we have already seen, this trouble resolved itself into sunshine a little later on, so that there is no further occasion to speak of it here.

So Margaret strove sedulously to persuade herself that happiness was hers at last.

Taking all things into consideration, there seemed no reason why Mrs. Bruhn should not be happy. Or, if not happy, at least content, which is our nineteenth century version of a word with whose real meaning but few of us are more than vaguely acquainted. But even Content, mild of mien and gentle-eyed though she be, loves best to come unwooed. To those who seek her through her elder sister, Duty, she comes oftenest and stays with them longest: to those who court her for herself alone, she rarely vouchsafes more than a passing smile.

Margaret Bruhn was not even content.

If she had cared less entirely for her husband, if he had been in any way less worthy of her, the secret trouble smouldering low down in her heart would probably have burnt itself out in time, and have left nothing but a pinch of ashes and a faint odour of regrets, like the perfume of withered rose-leaves, behind. But Mr. Bruhn was one of those men whom it is impossible to love half-heartedly. His wife's devotion to him was complete and thorough, and it was the very depth of this devotion that taught her to feel her own unworthiness so keenly. On her conscience there lay a secret which if told him would cause her to forfeit his love for ever; and because of the penalty which the telling of it would entail upon her, her conscience kept urging her more and more, even while she was most jealously

guarding it, to keep it hidden no longer—to cast the poisonous thing from her, and be whole again, however great the cost might be.

But time passed on—weeks and months—and Margaret Bruhn still delayed to do the one thing needful. She declared to herself again and again that she would *not* do it—would not sacrifice her dearest earthly possessions for the sake of an "unknown good." Silence had been purchased for her at a terrible price. Would it not be the height of absurdity, nay, even the height of madness, to declare that purchase void and of no avail?

All that she had to do was to keep her own counsel, and in time everything would go well with her. As for those troublesome voices, those inward monitors which spoke to her in the still hours of life, she determined to heed them not, but so to fill and occupy her round of days that in the whirring of many diverse wheels, their low grave tones should no longer smite the outward ear, even though some inner sense might tell her that they were still there, and only biding their time to make themselves heard again.

Thus it fell out that Margaret Bruhn was not *quite* happy.

CHAPTER XLVI.

SILAS RINGE'S RETURN.

EIGHT months had come and gone since the day of Esther Sarel's release from Ackworthing gaol, and another summer had faded into autumn. Mrs. Bruhn had frequent news from Esther, who, judging from her letters, was thoroughly comfortable, and content in the situation which Margaret had found for her. Margaret, not generally the most punctual of correspondents, never failed to answer Esther's letters within a post or two after her receipt of them. On neither side was mention ever made of the secret which drew these two women so closely together; it was never so much as hinted at; neither did the name of Silas Ringe find a place in their correspondence.

Business interests took Mr. Bruhn from Helsingham four or five times a year. Sometimes his visits were to London, sometimes they extended to the Continent, to the manufacturing towns of France and the Low Countries. Towards the end of October he started on one of his more extended journeys, expecting to be nearly a fortnight away. On the third evening after his departure, as Margaret was sitting in the library engaged in making some extracts from a moth-eaten chronicle in which mention was made of Helsingham as early as the eleventh century, one of the servants announced that an old woman was waiting to see her, who refused to mention either her name or her business, but who insisted upon seeing Mrs. Bruhn.

"Show her in," said Margaret; and presently a very old and

skinny woman was ushered into the library, who made Mrs. Bruhn a respectful curtsey, and then waited to be spoken to.

Margaret's first care was to make the old lady sit down, an object that was not accomplished without some difficulty, the chairs being evidently considered by her as of too ornamental a character to be used after the ordinary fashion of such articles. Then, and not till then, did Margaret inquire the object of her visit.

"I've come, ma'am, from Silas Ringe, who's lying at my house, struck for death."

As soon as Margaret could compose her voice, which was not for several moments, for the very mention of Silas Ringe's name struck a chill to her heart, she said, "And what is it that Mr. Ringe wishes me to do?"

"He wants to see his old sweetheart, Esther Sarel, before he dies. He thought that you might, maybe, know where she is, and would send for her. The wench must be here soon if she's to see Silas alive, for the poor lad's time in this world is short."

"I know where Esther Sarel is living, and will telegraph for her without delay; but she can hardly reach Helsingham before ten or eleven to-morrow morning."

"It will be a miracle, ma'am, if poor Silas lasts out till that time."

"I will write out a message at once," said Mrs. Bruhn, "and will send it down to the station by a mounted messenger. How long has Silas Ringe been at your house?"

"Three weeks come to-morrow. He looked very worn and ill when he came, and next day he was struck down with the fever that has been so bad all the summer at our end of the town; and now the doctors say, that though the fever's left him, he's sunk so low that they can't bring him round."

"Poor, poor fellow! How I wish that you had come to me when he was first taken ill."

"Eh, but, ma'am, how was I to know? I suppose he come to my house because his mother and me had been old friends, and I'm sure he was as welcome as the day to the spare shakedown in the little top room. But he never spoke about wanting to see anybody, being proud and sullen like, even when his fever was at the height, and it wasn't till he thought the doctors had given him up that he axed me to come to you and inquire about Esther."

Mrs. Bruhn left the room to despatch the message which she had been hastily writing while the old woman was talking to her.

"I will go back with you to your house," she said on her return. "In case Esther Sarel should not arrive in time to see him alive, it will comfort her to know that I was with him during his last moments."

"Law! ma'am, my house is not the sort of place for the likes of you," exclaimed the old crone; "besides, they do say the fever's catching, but it hasn't took me yet, thank goodness! though I've waited on the poor lad night and day since he were took bad."

"I *must* go with you," said Margaret. "I should never forgive myself afterwards, were I to neglect doing so. As far as money can repay you for what you have done to Silas Ringe, you shall be amply compensated. You must allow me ten minutes for changing my dress; meanwhile, I hope you will have something to eat and drink."

A cab took Mrs. Bruhn and the old woman to a corner of the street in which the latter lived. On the way, Margaret satisfied herself that nothing had been wanting in the case of Silas on the score of good medical advice. The old woman, whose name proved to be Mrs. Dearlove—which she pronounced as though it were a word of two unconnected syllables—gave her the names of the two doctors who had attended Silas, both of whom Margaret knew to be experienced men.

The neighbourhood in which Mrs. Dearlove lived was a very low and wretched one, so low and wretched, in fact, that Mrs. Bruhn was quite unaware that anything like it existed in Helsingham. Had she seen it by daylight, it would have seemed still worse, but some of its most repulsive features were hidden by the darkness, only faintly broken here and there by a sickly lamp.

Silas was lying on a truckle-bed in a top room of the little low-roofed house. With many aspects of illness Margaret was by no means unfamiliar; but she thought, as she entered the room where the young carpenter lay, that she had never seen any one who presented an appearance so utterly deathlike while still among the living. He seemed literally to be nothing but skin and bone; only, the skin was yellow parchment. He was too weak to lift a hand, or even to move his head without assistance; and he lay on his back, as immovable, except for the slow, laboured heavings of his chest, as one stretched for the grave. But his wide-open eyes looked bigger than ever they had done before, and shone with a light that seemed to have been kindled beyond the stars. He rolled them unceasingly from side to side of the little room, but apparently without any recognition of the actual objects before him, seeing some inner vision, it may be, but whether of the past or the future no mortal save himself would ever know.

Margaret's heart seemed to weep tears of blood as she gazed on the wreck before her. For the first time, she seemed to comprehend at a glance the whole series of events resulting from her one crime, as they followed each other in accordance with that sequential law which governs all our actions, good and bad, oftentimes making the event of to-day the result of something which happened yesterday, or a year ago, although we ourselves may be too purblind to distinguish the fine thread that knots up one with the other.

"Silas, honey!" said Mrs. Dearlove, bending over the sick man; "Silas, honey! here's a lady come to see thee."

But Silas took not the slightest notice. The big luminous eyes

still rolled steadily from side to side, as though they were watching the vibrations of some gigantic pendulum, visible to them alone.

"Poor darling! he don't hear me," said the old woman to Mrs. Bruhn. Then, in a louder voice, she addressed the sick man in the same terms as before. This time the familiar voice seemed to pierce his clouded senses, bringing him back from the very edge of the grave. It was strange, and at the same time inexpressibly touching, to watch the unsteady eyes steady themselves flickeringly; to mark the slow dawn of recognition creep painfully over the pallid face, till at length, as if an unseen angel had touched the sick man's eyes with his torch, there leapt into them a sudden flash, and Earth claimed him as her own again, to have and to hold for a little time longer.

"Where's Esther? I want Esther!" he said in a low clear whisper; and his burning eyes devoured the faces of Margaret and the old woman.

"She's been sent for, honey, by this kind lady. She's not living in the town now, but she's been sent for, and she'll be here in the morning."

"She must come soon," whispered the sick man, "or she will not find me here. Just now I fancied that she and I were out walking together in the fields, as we used to do on Sunday evenings in summer. I felt her hand on my arm as plain as ever I felt anything in my life; and there was a sprig of old-man in my button-hole; I seem to smell it now."

He had not appeared to notice Margaret before, but now his eyes wandered to her face, and rested there inquiringly. "This is the lady, Silas, that Esther used to live with. She would come to see thee, and it's she that's sent for Esther."

"Miss Davenant?" murmured Silas interrogatively.

"Yes, I am Miss Davenant," said Margaret, seating herself on a low stool by the edge of the bed. "You must forgive my intruding on you, but when I heard how ill you were, I could not help coming to see for myself whether I could not be of service to you in some way, and also to assure you that Esther has been telegraphed for, and will doubtless be here early in the morning."

"Ah, my Esther used always to be fond of you," said Silas, as though communing more with his own thoughts than attending to what Margaret had said. "I remember. Yes. Nothing is forgotten —nothing." He lapsed into silence, and his eyes began to wander a little, as though he heard dream-voices calling him back to the land of shadows and forgetfulness.

"How I wish I could do something for you," said Margaret. "Were it only till Esther shall arrive, and be able to take my place near you." There was a tone of unmistakable sympathy in her soft, clear voice. Silas's eyes steadied themselves again, and he came back to earthly things with a little sigh.

"Yes, my Esther was very fond of you," he murmured again. "Last time I saw her, she was in prison, poor child! and I left her in her trouble, like the mean coward that I was. I acted like a cur—a cur; I, who used to fancy that I had the makings of a gentleman in me. A wretched, low-bred cur!"

Here there came a slight interruption. A fresh bottle of medicine was brought by the doctor's boy, which Mrs. Dearlove at once opened and tasted approvingly. "Take a drop of it at once, honey," she said. "It's grand stuff."

So Silas took a draught, and it revived him wonderfully.

"Just you give me a good shake, if you please, ma'am, if I happen to be asleep as you go out," said the old woman in a low voice to Mrs. Bruhn; and then she went downstairs to snatch a little sleep by the fire.

"That was a strange, strange story that Esther told me in prison," began Silas, as if merely following out the current of his own thoughts; "and one that I have never been able to understand. Guilty, and yet not guilty. How is it possible to reconcile such a contradiction?" He paused; then, looking up suddenly at Margaret, he said: "Can you reconcile it for me, Miss Davenant?"

Margaret's pale face grew paler, and her soul seemed to shrink within her like a hunted criminal on whom the finger of Justice is about to be laid; but she answered not a word.

"Do *you* believe her guilty, Miss Davenant? Do you believe that she stole the letter?"

"I do not. I firmly believe her to have been innocent."

"That is what she herself said. She said, 'I am innocent; but the world must believe me guilty.' If she was innocent, why was she afraid to say so? Why did she allow herself to be put in prison for a crime that she had never committed, without making at least some effort to clear herself? It's all a weary puzzle to me."

He sighed heavily, and closed his eyes, as though he would fain shut out the world and its troubles for ever. What could Margaret say? How could she pour balm over the bruised heart of the dying man? She could not give him back the life, and love, and happiness that might have been his had that fatal letter never been touched. All that she could do was to brighten, in some measure, his last few moments on earth; and how little that was to do, in comparison with the evil that had wrought itself out, from a single wrong action, in consequences that would not merely influence the whole of her own life, but had already recoiled with such terrible force on the heads of at least two innocent persons!

But even the little that it lay in her power to do to sweeten the last hours of poor Silas, could only be accomplished by the sacrifice of that secret which both she and Esther had striven with such bitter pains to keep a secret for ever. That it must be sacrificed, she at once decided. Enough pain and misery had been incurred on her

account; and, although she was powerless to alter the past, there was one sure mode of preventing the gangrene from spreading further. She must tell the truth. And during those minutes, while Margaret Bruhn sat by the bed of the sinking man, almost in the very presence of the Angel of Death, a consciousness came over her that it would be better for her to lose the love and esteem of all who were dear to her, better to lose husband and home, than let her life remain any longer an acted lie—a fair surface, hiding that below which must in time poison the whole system beyond any possible cure. This was the consciousness that came over her, or rather, the revelation that was granted her—a revelation of the higher life, to attain to which she must leave the green slothful valley in which she had been sojourning, and pass with bare feet over the burning ploughshares, and into the desert beyond, where no green thing is, but where at times come faint whispers of encouragement, and sweet cooling winds that fill the soul with divine rapture, so that the heavenly gates seem nearer than of old, and the hills on which God sits for ever.

"Silas!" said Margaret, kneeling by the side of the bed, and pressing one of the sick man's wasted hands in both hers—"Silas! I believe Esther to have been entirely innocent of stealing the letter. I know her to have been so!"

Silas's fingers clutched those of Margaret convulsively. "It is you who tell me this, you who knew her so well?" he cried. "Oh! there must be some truth in it, there must be! You would not dare to deceive a dying man. But why is not Esther here? Why does she not come and tell me all about it? I want to hear my darling tell me with her own lips that she did not take the letter."

"A few hours will bring her to your side, and then she shall tell you, as I tell you now, that she was as innocent as you are of what was laid to her charge."

"But why could she not say so on her trial? I read the account of it in the papers; and it said there that she pleaded guilty. There's some mystery in it all that's past my power of finding out?"

"Esther sacrificed herself in order to save some one else," said Margaret in a voice that was hardly raised above a whisper.

"You know that? You are telling me the truth?" cried Silas eagerly; and as if Margaret's words had lent him new energy, he raised himself on one elbow, and stared into her white face with eager burning eyes.

"What I am telling you is the solemn truth," said Margaret. "Take comfort from my words, and——"

"Too late! too late!" said Silas mournfully. "If I had but known this at the time, I should not have left her as I did. If she had but trusted me! But she did not, and my wretched pride made me desert her; and now I am here, and your words have come too late."

Margaret had slipped down by the side of the bed, and buried her

face in her hands. "I am a murderess," she kept repeating to herself, and those few words told the whole burden of her thoughts. The pathos of Silas's "too late" pierced her dark mood, and she burst into tears. Her sobs broke the reverie into which Silas had fallen during the last few moments. He looked at her curiously.

"Since the strange fact you have just told me is so well known to you," he said, "you are no doubt acquainted with the name of the person for whose sake my Esther was allowed to sacrifice herself and me?"

"I am," moaned Margaret through her tears.

"Tell me the name of that person," said Silas.

"Margaret Davenant!"

The words seemed to be torn from her by main force, and as she spoke them she flung up her clenched hands, and seemed to call Heaven to witness that her wretched secret was a secret no longer.

The temporary strength lent him by his medicine, and by the excitement of talking with Margaret, was fast deserting Silas, and he sank back on his pillow with a low groan of mingled pain and weakness. For a little while he lay utterly silent, and with closed eyes, except for his laboured breathing, like one already dead. Presently his eyes opened, and in them was a fierce baleful light, like that which shone in them when he spurned Esther from him in the prison as a guilty creature on whom he would never look more. By an almost superhuman effort he raised himself in bed, and stretching over, laid a bony hand on Margaret's shoulder. "Wretched woman!" he began in a voice that was as loud, clear, and distinct as if he had been in full health, "it was for your sake, then, to save you from detection, that the happiness of two people was ruthlessly destroyed; that one of them was branded as a thief before the world, and the other rendered so miserable that death seemed better to him than life! You, the superfine lady, were the real thief, and that poor girl was merely your scapegoat! You could let her be taken up, and put into prison, and suffer the punishment that you ought to have suffered, and all without so much as lifting a finger to try to save her! You had the heart and the conscience to allow this!"

"Hear me for one moment," pleaded Margaret through her tears. "I was away, out of England, at the time the discovery was made. That Esther took the blame and the punishment on herself in order to save me, is quite true, but it was done without my knowledge or sanction. I say this not to lessen in the slightest degree the nobility of Esther's action, but to prove to you that I am not so deeply to blame as may at first sight appear. I knew nothing of what Esther had done for me, I did not even know that the letter had been discovered, till after my return to England, which was not till Esther's imprisonment was within a fortnight of being over."

"Woman!" cried Silas sternly—and his long, lean fingers griped her by the shoulder till she could not repress a low cry of agony—

"woman! do you know what it was your duty to have done—your bare duty, and nothing more? Yes, you know it just as well as I can tell you. You know that the first hour of your knowledge ought to have been the last of Esther's imprisonment. But how much longer is this lie to be believed by the world? How much longer is my poor girl to be held as a thief, and compelled to find a home far away from all who know her? How much longer, I ask, shall this foul wrong remain unrighted?"

"No longer—no longer!" cried Margaret. "This very night it shall be told—told to those whose love and esteem I value beyond aught else on earth."

"How am I to know that you are not lying to me? Swear, by all that you hold most holy, that you will not let another sun rise till you have told the whole truth about this cursed matter!"

"I swear it, by all that I hold most holy!" said Margaret solemnly.

"I shall die, but my Esther will live. Her character will be cleared, and will shine out brighter than before. But all this comes too late to give me back the happiness and love that ought to have been mine—too late to mend my broken life!"

These last words died away in a whisper that was almost inaudible. He sank back on his pillow; an expression of awe ineffable crept like a shadowy veil over his features; his eyes filmed; he murmured something faintly; a light foam gathered on his lips; a shiver passed through him twice from head to foot; and Silas Ringe was no longer among the living.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE REEL WOUND UP.

"GONE is he, poor dear?" said Mrs. Dearlove coolly, as she hobbled upstairs in answer to Margaret's cry. "The doctor's last words to me were, that he might go off any minute. No use fetching anybody at this time of the night. All the doctors in the three kingdoms couldn't bring him back to us for five seconds. He'll make a lovely corpse, poor lad!"

As soon as Margaret could get out of the house of death, she hurried home as though wings had been added to her feet. By this time it was close upon midnight, and the little town was abed. She scarcely met a soul all the way as she went. The servant, an old family one, who let her in stared at her, and ventured to ask if she were well.

"No, she was not ill, only tired," she said; and she ordered a light to be taken into the library, and gave orders that no one need sit up any longer. Having bathed her hands and face, she sat down to write. She would not trust herself to reflect upon the promise she

had made to Silas Ringe; she would act upon it without a moment's delay. Her first letter was addressed to Sir Richard Ashburnham, the magistrate before whom Esther Sarel had been first examined, and by whom she had been committed for trial. Resting her head in her hands for a little while, till she had succeeded in collecting her thoughts sufficiently to enable her to put into quiet, commonplace language what she had to say, she at length dipped her pen in the inkstand, and wrote as under:—

"Dear Sir Richard,—It may probably be within your recollection that about eleven months ago a girl, Esther Sarel by name, who had acted in the capacity of my maid during the time I was at Irongate House, was brought before you charged with having stolen a certain letter from the Helsingham post-office. The letter in question had been sent from Australia, and was addressed to Mr. Hugh Randolph, a surgeon of this town, who since that time has become my brother-in-law. The letter was found hidden away in an ebony casket belonging to me, which had been stolen some time previously from Irongate House; and it—the casket—was afterwards found in some fields outside the town with the letter still intact in a secret drawer. Both Esther and I had been in the post-office (in the sorting-room) the same evening that the letter was missed, and it seemed certain that either she or I must have taken it. When Mr. Dawkins came to inquire into the affair, he was induced, from Esther's manner, to set her down as the guilty person. He accused her of having stolen the letter, and she at once confessed that she had done so. With the result you are acquainted. Esther was brought before you next day, and committed for trial, and when that event came off, she was sentenced to four months' imprisonment.

"Both before you, and before the judge who tried her, Esther Sarel confessed to having stolen the letter. And yet that confession was wholly untrue. She did not steal the letter; she did not even know of its having been stolen till accused by Mr. Dawkins. I, and I alone, was the thief.

"Into the motives by which I was actuated when I took the letter it is not needful that I should enter here. I may, however, state that it was not taken with the expectation of finding money in it (I have not sunk quite so low as that), but merely to keep back for a short time from the person to whom it was addressed a certain piece of information with which I had accidentally become acquainted.

"The letter was found, and the arrest of Esther Sarel took place, the day after I left England on my wedding tour. Not the slightest intimation of the affair reached my ears till my return, more than three months later, by which time Esther Sarel's imprisonment was within a fortnight of its expiration. I at once sought an interview with her in prison, and I then ascertained, for the first time, by what motives she had been influenced in taking on herself the guilt of a

transaction of which she was entirely innocent. She had done it to save me—done it out of gratitude for a few acts of simple kindness shown towards her mother when she lay ill, and towards a youthful brother and sister after the mother's death. Does this seem incredible to you? Read and believe. I write nothing but the simple truth. The antique virtues are not extinct; they can flourish even in the bosom of a servant-girl.

"The result of my interview with Esther was simply this: that Esther remained in prison to work out the term of her sentence, while I went back home, and spoke no word to any one of the secret that lay so heavily on my life.

"That it should remain a secret was agreed between Esther and myself. She was noble enough to entreat that it should be so, and I was coward enough to accept her offer. In viewing my own conduct in this matter I am not troubled with any obliquity of vision; it shows quite as black in my eyes as it can possibly do in yours, or in those of any other person. Neither could your reproaches—if to reproach were your province—add aught of bitterness to those waters of Marah of which my soul has drunk of late till it is nigh sick unto death.

"When Esther Sarel came out of prison, I had a situation ready for her in a town a hundred miles from Helsingham, and there she has remained since that time. I had determined in my own mind that my secret should remain a secret for ever, that not even my husband should become aware of the crime of which his wife had been guilty. It is not necessary to recapitulate here the circumstances that have induced me to alter that decision. That I *have* decided to alter it, my present communication to you is sufficient proof. To you, as the magistrate by whom Esther Sarel was committed, I send this simple statement of facts, leaving you to deal with it in whatever way you may deem most advisable. My wish is that Esther Sarel should be exculpated in the eyes of all who knew her from any participation in a crime for which she has been unjustly punished.

"I shall send a copy of this statement to my husband, who is at present from home. I dread the shock to him ten thousand times more than I fear anything that can happen to myself.

"Margaret Bruhn."

Without pausing to think, or to read over what she had written, when Margaret had completed her letter to Sir Richard Ashburnham, she at once penned the following note to her husband:—

"My dearest Robert,—Accompanying these lines you will receive a copy of a statement, the original of which I shall send by the next post to Sir Richard Ashburnham. That its contents will prove a terrible shock to you, I cannot doubt. The nature of the immediate circumstances which induces me to keep no longer as a secret

that which I have carefully hidden for so long a time, I will reveal to you when I see you next. I cannot write respecting them. That you will ever again look upon me as your wife, after you shall have read my confession, is more than I dare hope for. I do not even ask you to forgive me—at least, not now. There are some wrongs too monstrous for immediate forgiveness, and the wrong I have done you is one of them. Darling! I have loved you very, very dearly; and the very depth of that love increases my humiliation ten thousand fold. Do with me as you will. Imprison me; cast me out of house and home; refuse to look on me ever again; and I will not murmur. My greatest punishment will lie in the thought that I have deceived you, who loved me and trusted me so implicitly—in the recollection that I willingly allowed you to wed a thief.

"Give me credit, however, for this much: that had there seemed to me at the time I married you the remotest probability of this thing ever rising up in judgment against me, I would rather have been struck dead at your feet than have become your wife. I had good reason for believing that it was buried out of sight for ever, and that my secret would die with me, unsuspected by every one. What my motives were for taking the letter, and how the act has at length been brought home to me, are points on which I cannot enter now. If you do not choose to hear them from my lips, I will put them down in writing for you whenever you may wish me to do so. You will no doubt be able to judge better than I as to what the action of Sir Richard Ashburnham will probably be on receipt of my communication. Inspired by that fortitude which despair alone can lend the soul, I await here whatever may happen next. Come what may, I shall never, never cease to love you. Dearest! is it not written that in expiation there lies a virtue sufficient to wash away the stains of even greater crimes than mine? If this be so, should we meet no more on earth, it may, perhaps, be granted to me to meet you again in that Hereafter to which the happy and the unhappy are alike hastening. That hope is all that is now left to console

"Your wretched
"MARGARET."

With this letter to her husband Mrs. Bruhn inclosed a copy of the one intended for Sir Richard Ashburnham. When both were ready, she put on a bonnet and shawl, and slipped out of the quiet house, in which no one was up but herself, and hurried through the deserted streets, stopping for a moment now and then to gather breath, till she reached the post-office. She dropped her letters into the box with a sort of slow reluctance; but when they were in and past her recovery, she seemed to breathe more freely, as a wretch on whom sentence has been delayed might do when he hears his doom and there is no longer room for suspense.

A light shone through the blinds of the familiar post-office window.

The sight of it brought vividly back to Margaret's mind every minute event of that fatal evening, and as she went back homeward she re-enacted the whole hateful drama in her own mind, with all its phases of shame and misery, as though she were rehearsing some half-forgotten part, which she might be called upon to go through again at a moment's notice.

She felt fevered and ill when she got home, and unutterably weary. Instead of going to bed, she lay down on the sofa in her dressing-room, and there passed the remainder of the night. In the morning she was worse, and her illness grew upon her as the day advanced. "Perhaps I shall die," she said to herself more than once. "It will be better for Robert—better for every one that I should die. We always think tenderly of our dead, and they would think tenderly of me when I should be no more."

Margaret's letter reached her husband in Paris. She had only written the truth when she stated that its contents would prove a great shock to him. He hurried home with the least possible delay, but Mrs. Bruhn was past recognizing him by the time he reached Brook Lodge. She had been struck down by the same fever that had claimed Silas as a victim. She had brought the contagion from his death-bed.

Mr. Bruhn found a message awaiting him from Sir Richard Ashburnham, who had been one of his most intimate friends for many years, and as soon as he had seen everything done for his wife that could be done, he drove over to see him. Mrs. Bruhn's strange communication was fully discussed between them, the decision at which they arrived being, that so long as Mrs. Bruhn should remain in the condition in which she then was, her confession should be kept strictly private, and no proceedings of any kind be taken in the matter.

Mr. Bruhn sent for Esther Sarel immediately after his return from Sir Richard's. Esther was in Helsingham, having gone thither in compliance with the telegram sent her by Mrs. Bruhn on the night of Silas's death. She had stayed to see her lover buried, and was just on the point of going back to her situation when Mr. Bruhn's summons reached her. She had wondered that no message from Margaret had been received by her during the four or five days of her stay in Helsingham, especially after she had learned from Mrs. Dearlove that Mrs. Bruhn had been with Silas at the moment of his death; but having come to the conclusion that Margaret must have some secret reasons for not communicating with her, she was about to take her leave of the little town without venturing near Brook Lodge, when she received the message desiring her to go up there at once.

Her interview with Mr. Bruhn was a painful one for both of them. Esther was not slow to understand the kind of person with whom she had to deal, and quickly saw that any reservations or

concealments which she might feel inclined to make as in the interest of Margaret would be worse than useless. Consequently, she made a full and frank statement of all the circumstances so far as they were known to her.

Her distress was extreme when told by Mr. Bruhn of the confession which his wife had made a few days previously. She cried bitterly for a long time, and implored Mr. Bruhn to keep the confession as a secret confided to him alone, and that even at the eleventh hour all might yet be well. Mr. Bruhn could promise nothing. He could only await the recovery of his wife with what patience was possible to him, till which time no further step of any kind could be taken in the matter. He was appalled at the abyss that had opened so suddenly at his feet, and stood as one amazed, not knowing which way to turn.

The crisis of Margaret's illness came and went, and the doctors decided that she would recover. And recover she did, in body but not in mind. Her wits were gone: she was melancholy mad. She knew neither husband, nor sister, nor father. Esther alone she recognized; and as Esther's presence seemed to soothe the darker fits of her malady and to act more beneficially upon her than that of any stranger could have done, Esther prayed to be allowed to accompany her when it was found necessary to remove her to a private asylum; and so went with her, and waited upon her with a loving patience that seemed never to grow weary.

One peculiarity of Mrs. Bruhn's malady was that she was continually striving to hide away a letter that she fancied she had stolen. In order to humour her she was supplied with a fictitious letter, which, with a great show of mystery, she hid every morning in a fresh place, her only anxiety, so far as those about her could judge, being lest any one, by design or accident, should discover the spot where she had so carefully put it away. She had other strange fancies. "I know quite well what place this is," she would often say to Esther. "It is a private madhouse, and I am shut up here in order that my vast property may be enjoyed by some one else. They will never let me out alive, I am quite aware of that. But the world shall learn my sad history from my memoirs. They will form a most remarkable book. I shall begin them next week without fail, and don't forget, Esther, to have a fine quill ready for me on Monday morning. One's memoirs ought always to be written with a quill."

Despite this sad aberration of mind, the physician under whose care Mrs. Bruhn was placed did not fail to cheer her husband with hopes of her ultimate recovery.

These hopes were happily verified. By degrees her reason came back to her, and at the end of two years she quitted the asylum thoroughly and permanently cured.

Her return to sanity was a process full of anguish and humiliation of soul. When she called to mind, one by one, the events that had

happened to her up to the time that she was taken ill; when she knelt again in memory by the death-bed of Silas Ringe, and penned once more in thought her letter to Sir Richard Ashburnham, and that other letter to her husband, she was almost ready to wish that in this world her senses had never been restored to her.

What had been the effect of her confession upon her husband? That at once became the great question with her as soon as she fully understood where she was and the chain of events that had conducted her thither. Did he still look upon her as his wife? Had he ever been to see her during her long confinement? Or had he cast her off from the first, utterly and for ever?

These were but a few of the self-torturing questions put by her to Esther Sarel.

Esther's assurances that Mr. Bruhn still regarded her as his wife, that he was in no way changed, unless it were by his deep anxiety for her recovery, fell like sweetest balm over Margaret's troubled spirit, soothing her reason, which seemed still to flutter and tremble in the balance, with hopes of a happiness that seemed to her far greater than her deserts. Still, it was not without much inward fear and trembling that she awaited her first interview with her husband after the power of recognition had been given back to her.

But when they did meet, she was not left long in doubt. Mr. Bruhn's joy at finding that his wife was really about to be restored to him was too genuine to admit of the slightest question on her part.

"And can you really and truly forgive me, and look upon me with the same loving eyes as of old?" asked Margaret when she had recounted to her husband the whole story of her one crime, and how she had promised Silas Ringe on his deathbed that it should remain a secret no longer.

"'Let him that is without sin cast the first stone,'" answered Mr. Bruhn. "Yes, Margaret, as I stand in need of forgiveness myself, so can I freely and fully forgive you. You erred, and bitterly have you paid for your error. With Esther Sarel, to whom we both owe so much, it now rests to decide in what form and to what extent her dying lover's wish that her innocence should be declared before the world shall be carried out. If Esther says that it must be carried out to the extreme letter, we can only bow our heads and accept the consequences."

"That was certainly the spirit in which Silas Ringe intended that his wishes should be carried out."

"Probably so," answered Mr. Bruhn. "But, for all that, the question must now be decided by Esther. Her noble heart will teach her to decide upon that which is best for all of us to do—even that which Silas himself would most approve, now that his soul is purged from earthly passions, could his voice but reach us from the other side of the grave."

Esther was summoned, and now first learnt what had passed between Mrs. Bruhn and Silas on the night of the latter's death.

What she was told distressed her greatly. But when Mr. Bruhn informed her that his wife, in her determination to carry out the promise she had made the dying man, had sent, not merely to her husband, but also to Sir Richard Ashburnham, a confession that it was she alone who stole the letter, and that it now rested with her, Esther, as the one who had suffered most for that other person's fault, to decide in what form and within what limits the said confession of guilt should be made public—Esther at once vehemently protested against any further steps being taken in the matter. She maintained that in what Mrs. Bruhn had already done she had carried out the wish of Silas as far as there was the slightest necessity for her to do so. The secret was a secret no longer, and therein the behests of Silas had been obeyed; further than that it would be madness to go. The crime had already been expiated in full. Let that expiation suffice, and seek not to reopen an old wound on which Time's healing touch was already laid. Esther finished by saying that if Mrs. Bruhn should still persist in declaring her guilt to the world, she, Esther, would combat the assertion as the hallucination of a mad woman.

Mr. Bruhn was unutterably relieved to find that Esther's decision coincided so closely with his own secret hopes; but Margaret's conscience was only half satisfied: between what she had done and what she had promised Silas that she would do, the gap was so wide! After several conversations with her husband and Esther, at intervals and when her mind was clear enough to grasp the whole question, the decision ultimately arrived at was this:—that Mrs. Bruhn should reveal the real facts of the case to Dr. Randolph and his wife, to her father, to Mrs. Sutton, to Miss Easterbrook, and to Miss Ivimpey, as people to all of whom Esther was well known, and whose good opinion must be precious to her; but that beyond this limited circle not even a whisper of suspicion should be breathed against Mrs. Bruhn. It was not without great difficulty that Esther was induced to agree to even this concession, but Margaret was so firm in the matter that she was at length compelled to give way.

This confession was not made till some weeks subsequent to Margaret's first interview with her husband after her reason had come back to her, for it was not till nearly two months later that her physician pronounced her thoroughly cured, and sanctioned her return home. It is hardly needful to say that Esther Sarel accompanied her. Next day she summoned all those whose names are given above, and then and there she told her story.

No persuasion would have been sufficient to induce Esther to stay at Brook Lodge that afternoon. She crept away to Mrs. Dearlove's, and there she remained till a late hour listening to all that the garrulous old woman had to tell her respecting poor, dead Silas. She

had heard it more than once before; but each time the story of his illness and death was told her, it struck her with a sort of sad freshness, and seemed to lose none of its interest by repetition. A neat monument, at Mr. Bruhn's expense, had been erected over the grave of Silas, and Mrs. Bruhn's first visit after her return home was—in the company of Esther—to the cemetery in which the young carpenter slept his last sleep.

It may be added here that the sideboard carved by Silas Ringe was duly exhibited in London, where it did not fail to attract considerable attention. When the Exhibition was over, it was fixed in its position in the dining-room at White Towers, where it may still be seen together with many other curiosities, ancient and modern. The price, as agreed upon with Lord Borrowash, was paid over after the death of Silas to the young carpenter's next of kin.

Of late, the routine of business had grown irksome to Mr. Bruhn, and he was glad, for the satisfaction of his own conscience, to seize on so sufficient an excuse as the state of his wife's health to break through the trammels that had held him for so many years, and which but a little while ago he would not have believed it possible that he could ever wish to escape from. At the end of three months from the date of Mrs. Bruhn's return home, he had completed the requisite arrangements for the transfer of his business; and leaving the final settlements in the care of his solicitors, he bid farewell to the little town, and, accompanied by his wife and Esther Sarel, he set out for a lengthened tour abroad.

The last news received at Helsingham states that Mr. and Mrs. Bruhn were on their way back from Jerusalem. They will probably return to England after a time, in which case it is not unlikely that Mr. Bruhn will enter the exciting arena of political life, and Margaret's long-standing ambition to see her husband in Parliament may, perhaps, be gratified.

Esther Sarel is still with them, and will stay with them through life. She is not looked upon in any way as a dependant. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Bruhn would for one moment agree to regard her in that light. She is their very devoted, humble friend. She is regarded everywhere as one of the family, and she has risen with the occasion. Her powers of adaptability are considerable, and as she reads a great deal, and is constantly mixing with educated people, she has come at length to look like "one to the manner born;" and in that pale, quiet woman —quiet in manner and quiet in dress,—the chief characteristic of whose face is its *goodness;* who does not talk much, but whose opinions, when asked for, are all instinct with plain, good sense,—few would suspect that they were looking on one who but a few short years ago was nothing more than a waiting-maid in a ladies' school. Esther will never marry. Her love for Silas Ringe was the one passion of her life. She is one of those rare women who love solitude for its own sake, and seek it out; and as Esther has that fine tact

which comes to some people as a gift of nature, she never seems *de trop*, and is especially careful that neither Mr. Bruhn nor Margaret shall have occasion to think her company a bore.

Of Margaret herself what shall be said in conclusion? Merely this:—that she is brighter and happier, healthier in mind and body, than she has been for many years. It is the quiet, toned-down happiness of an autumnal day. The garishness of summer has fled like a dream; in the atmosphere there is a faint, impalpable melancholy, a subtle odour of sadness, that pervades the whole landscape, and is yet almost as delicious as the first fresh breath of spring, while about it there is a mellow sweetness such as never fans the hoyden cheek of May.

Mrs. Cardale is still as much an invalid as when introduced to the reader's notice. She and Margaret are great friends, and pass much of their time in each other's society. She can never be sufficiently grateful to Margaret for having weaned her brother from "that detestable mill," although Margaret, in reality, had nothing whatever to do in the matter.

Our darling Trix has a little family growing up around her, and is as happy a young matron as you would find in a day's search. Mrs. Chillinghurst, of Pingley Dene, did not forget the request of her particular friend, Mrs. Cardale. She took Trix by the hand, and introduced her to some of the best families in the county, and included her frequently in invitations to the Dene parties. On several occasions when she drove into Helsingham she stopped to take luncheon with the doctor's pretty wife. These were certain proofs that the great county lady was thoroughly satisfied with her *protégée*, and the best circles of Helsingham were not slow to follow the lead thus given them. Trix is fond of society, and she went out a great deal during the first three years of her married life. Of late, however, maternal duties have claimed more of her time and thoughts, but there is no reason to suppose that life is less pleasant to her on that account. She never looks happier that when romping with her youngsters in the nursery, in which noisy apartment Mrs. Sutton spends more hours than it would be convenient to count. The old lady is still as dictatorial and self-opinionated as ever; but she seems to be universally beloved by the little people, whom she alternately scolds and coddles after a fashion that Dr. Hugh would not allow from any other than herself.

But the Doctor's practice has extended so much of late that he has scant time for thoughts unconnected with his profession. He is probably the hardest-worked man in Helsingham; and although he sometimes grumbles that his patients are slowly killing him instead of the reverse, his measure of content would be less deep were his days less busily occupied. People say that he must be making his fortune, but that is as it may be. It may interest some fair reader to know that his wife has, for her own particular use, as neat a little brougham as even the Ladies' Mile could show.

Mr. Davenant has resided with Dr. Hugh since the breaking-up of the establishment at Brook Lodge. Increasing age has not failed to bring with it some touch of infirmity; but if slightly more shaky on his legs than he used to be, he is still as carefully got up as ever, and by gaslight looks at least fifteen years younger than he really is.

Between Miss Easterbrook and Mr. Davenant there is a mild flirtation of long standing; but that it will ever end in matrimony, neither of the parties chiefly concerned, nor any one who is aware of its existence, ever believes for a moment. Still, the flirtation—a tea-and-toast one from the first—goes on, and will probably last as long as the ancient Adonis himself. Mr. Davenant is just the kind of man who, if he were on his deathbed, and a lady called to see him, would think more of paying her a compliment than of the serious subjects that ought to engage his thoughts at such a time.

The prestige of the worthy mistress of Irongate House has in no wise decreased. Her establishment is always full, and, really, Miss Easterbrook must have a very nice little balance at her banker's. Every spring she makes a point of telling her friends that she intends to retire into private life before the close of the year. But one year comes to an end after another, and still finds her nestled among her fledgelings, under the old roof of Irongate House, and there, without doubt, she will remain while she lives.

In a retired corner of the country churchyard where lie the remains of her father and mother, Charlotte Herne sleeps her last sleep. The unquiet heart is at rest now. The fluttering prisoner that beat its wings so vainly against the cage in which cruel circumstance had confined it, pants for liberty no longer; through that golden portal which we call death, liberty has come to her as it must come to each of us in turn. Whatever her errors may have been, we would fain hope that with that liberty poor Charlotte has also found pardon and peace—"the peace that passeth all understanding."

And so, dear reader—Farewell.

THE END.

THE DALESMEN OF EYAM.

By Christian Burke.

IT was the fatal summer of 1666, and far away among the Derbyshire hills, the picturesque little village of Eyam, where now the modern tourist takes his peaceful holiday, was sore besieged. There was no sound of cannon or musketry, no flashing of swords or trampling of horses, no ringing tread of an armed host through the long quaint village street. Noiselessly yet resistlessly came the foe, and underneath the sultry summer sky was fought out day by day for four long weary months a strange and ghastly battle almost without its parallel in the pages of history.

Eyam, or the "Village of Waters" as it is sometimes called, is situated near the Derbyshire Peak. Sheltered from the winds by a thickly-wooded mountain range, it nestles at the foot of the hills in the very heart of the most beautiful and varied scenery, and luxuriant and fertile vegetation.

Sheltered in their own peaceful little valley, sowing and reaping their fruitful fields, plying their simple trades, it is probable that the villagers of Eyam knew and cared but little for the terrible pestilence that was raging in the great Metropolis and its vicinity, and was now approaching this quiet world-forgotten little hamlet to reap a yet more terrible harvest.

It was in the September of 1665 that the passing bell of Eyam tolled out for the soul of one George Vicars, a tailor, living in a little cottage not far from the churchyard. And then the rumour first spread from house to house as to the awful nature of the disease that had so suddenly swept off one who a few days before was hale and strong.

"They say it is the plague!" spoke the good-wife to her husband, dropping her voice as she uttered the dreaded word; and neighbour looked at neighbour with whitening lips and startled eyes; even the children stopped at their play and shivered as they heard of the fatal box of clothing which had been sent to the tailor by a relative in London, and which brought with it the seeds of death.

"God's mercy! who may be the next?" said the gossips as they spun their wheels before the door; and the lads and lassies gathered in the sunset light beside the stream hushed their laughter, and filled their pitchers in silence as the news of that death broke in with solemn menace on their young and happy lives.

Thus it was that the pestilence first reached Eyam, and so virulent was it in form that all through the winter, in spite of the cold which usually held it in check, it claimed its victims by ones and twos, until

by the beginning of June 1666 some seventy-seven persons out of the small population had sickened and died.

During these months, to every house on which the ominous red cross was drawn came the good Rector William Mompesson in the exercise of his sacred calling, tending the sick, ministering the last rites to the dying, comforting the terrified and heart-broken mourners; at once both priest, physician and friend, to his stricken flock.

The character of William Mompesson shines out amid these scenes of darkness and death as at once a leader of men, and a type of that self-devoted priesthood that in every age and every clime has been and is the glory of the Church of Christ.

But little is known of his early history. He came to Eyam in 1664, having previously married a young and beautiful girl named Catherine, the daughter of Ralph Carr of Cocken, in the county of Durham, and they had at the time of the outbreak two little children —George and Elizabeth, one of whom at least must have been scarcely out of babyhood.

That Mompesson was in the first instance somewhat disappointed at his preferment, probably desiring some more important and active field of labour, we gather from his own sad and self-reproachful letters written in the November of 1666 when the disease had done its worst, in which he laments his own ingratitude and want of appreciation of the blessings of his lot. Be that as it may, from the moment of the death of Vicars on to the bitter end of the following year he never faltered in his duties, never relaxed his efforts, never even in the agonising calamity that desolated his own home, shrank from his burden. But literally laid down his life, and that which was far more precious than life itself, in the service of his people, caring for nothing save that his Master's work might be done.

In the early part of June 1666, the pestilence broke out with redoubled fury, and the panic-stricken people were nearly beside themselves with fear. Catherine Mompesson, in an agony of grief, flung herself at her husband's feet, and besought him to fly from the doomed village with herself and their little children beyond the reach of the fell destroyer.

"The hireling fleeth because he *is* an hireling . . . . the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." Nay! he asked her—would she have him faithless to his God and to his orders? Should the sick be untended, the dying unabsolved, the Holy Sacrifice uncelebrated, and the desolate unconsoled, that he might haply preserve in despicable security for a few days or months or years that life that was long ago given over to the service of the world's Redeemer? There was a time of reckoning for all things; should he one day have to stand before his Maker, and, overwhelmed with grief and shame, be able to make no answer when the solemn cry went forth, "Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?"

Then he in his turn sought to persuade her to leave him, and to

take the little ones who needed her so sorely, and go with them to their relatives in Derby. But Catherine had no fears for or thought of her own safety; and his entreaties only determined her to send away the children, though it almost broke her heart to separate from them; as for herself, her place was at her husband's side, and from this resolution nothing could move her.

There was no time for delay, and that same summer evening the two young parents kissed the smiling baby-faces, and, commending them to God, sent their dear ones away in the care of a trusted servant out of the baleful atmosphere that surrounded their once happy home. We can imagine how the mother wept and hung above her darlings, how she lingered wistfully at the door watching, long after the shadowy outline of their little forms and the waving of their tiny hands had become lost in the gathering darkness, and then turned wearily back into the house with a sad foreboding at her heart which told her that she should never look upon their faces any more.

It was at this juncture that Mompesson discovered that preparations were being rapidly made for a general flight. A few of the wealthier inhabitants had already indeed left, and the remainder, unable to bear their misery any longer, determined to quit the village in a body, heedless or ignorant that they would carry with them wherever they went the fatal pestilence, and sow it throughout the length and breadth of their own and the adjoining counties.

There is but little doubt that had this course been adopted the mournful history of Eyam would have been repeated in every village in Derbyshire, and instead of one little hamlet the entire surrounding country side would have been devastated. At this supreme moment Mompesson faced the difficulties of his position with a courage and a wisdom that under God saved the lives of many thousands of people. Calling his terror-stricken flock together he made a passionate appeal to them, entreating them to reconsider their decision. He pointed out that there was not the slightest security that such a measure would save their own lives, steeped as they were in infection; and that there was an absolute certainty that wherever they went they would carry with them a baleful death, bringing sorrow and desolation into countless happy and unsuspecting homes. He put before them an heroic alternative—that they should isolate themselves within the narrow confines of their little village, letting the plague work its will upon them, for whom, as he frankly told them, there was but little chance of escape; and thus by this means save their brethren.

When one considers how strong in human nature is the hope and love of life, how almost uncontrollable the unreasoning fear, the impulse towards flight from an imminent and unknown danger on the part of a number of persons animated both by the same dread and desire, one would not have been surprised had Mompesson's words fallen on deaf ears, and hearts deadened to all thought or care for any

save themselves. But to the lasting honour and glory of Eyam, the appeal was not made in vain.

Mompesson, looking into the troubled faces round him, told them that if they would but promise solemnly before God to abide by his conditions, no want or needless suffering should fall upon them. He would at once write to the nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood, and arrange for all supplies and necessities to be brought from without, to given places on the outskirts of the village, while a boundary should be set beyond which none should pass either from without or from within.

Thus, he said, shutting in among themselves their fell enemy, they would cripple its power, burying it if need be in their own graves, until in His own good time God should see fit to lay to His hand and deliver them therefrom. Until that day let them be patient and brave, resting in the sure and certain hope that even the sufferings of this present time were as nothing to the glory that was to come; while death itself, however terrible, was but after all a gateway opening into everlasting life.

Something of the speaker's enthusiasm must have flashed back from the worn and haggard faces of his listeners—something of that greater love, that spirit of self-abnegation that attained its Divine culmination on the Cross of Him who died for the whole world, must have found an echo in the hearts of those simple, unlettered folk, for no dissentient voice was raised—with one accord they accepted Mompesson's conditions, and the promise made was kept unbroken to the last.

From that time forward there was neither going in nor coming out of Eyam—without, the plague, like an invisible wall, surrounded the devoted little village; while from within, a still more impassable barrier that their own hearts and consciences had raised, barred all communication with the outer world.*

In response to Mompesson's letters, the gentry of the neighbourhood, and more especially the Earl of Devonshire, undertook to supply the village with all necessaries and provisions. "A kind of circle," says the chief authority on matters connected with Eyam, "was drawn round the village, marked by particular and well-known stones and hills, beyond which it was solemnly agreed no one of the villagers should pass, whether infected or no. This circle extended about half a mile round the village, and to two or three places or points in this boundary provisions were brought. A well or rivulet northward of Eyam, called to this day Mompesson's Well or Brook, was one of the places where articles were deposited. These articles were brought very

* The only exceptions appear to have been that one wet day a carter of Bubnell chose to drive through Eyam, and on another occasion a poor woman, under some pressing necessity, attempted to reach the market at Tideswell. Both met with rude treatment from the terrified people, when it became known from whence they had come.

early in the morning by persons from adjacent villages, who when they had delivered them beside the well, fled with the precipitation of panic. Individuals appointed by Mompesson and Stanley fetched the articles left, and when they took money it was placed in the well or certain stone troughs to be purified; thus preventing contagion by passing from hand to hand. . . . When money was sent, it was only for some extra or particular articles, the provisions and many other necessaries were supplied, it is supposed, by the Earl of Devonshire." . . . . "The wisdom of Mompesson," continues this writer, "can only be surpassed by the courage of the inhabitants in not trespassing beyond the bounds marked out." *

For the magnificence of their sacrifice to stand out in its true proportions, it must also be borne in mind that these were but a handful of simple country folk, many of them ignorant and uncultured, with all the prejudices and superstitions of their class. They had been ready to put faith in every infallible remedy, and in everything that promised the slightest hope of escape; to them it would have probably seemed that in flight lay their one chance of personal immunity, and the surrender of this hope must have been a sore effort. A surrender which, together with their patient endurance, their loyal obedience to the one man who had the wisdom to conceive and the nerve and devotion to carry out this difficult enterprise, had its source alike in that Faith which knows nothing of self-interest or self-preservation, but only of self-renunciation.

All through the months of June, July, and August, the plague continued to rage with unabated fury. The sunny village street was deserted; the roses bloomed and faded all ungathered; the cattle lowed untended in the meadows; the fruit hung in blighted clusters in the orchards; and the waving corn ripened in the fields, but none had heart or strength to reap the harvest. The weather was hot and sultry; the atmosphere loaded and oppressive, and the sunshine fell with sickly glare into the chambers where, one after another, men, women, and little children laid them down to die.

The dust gathered on the spinning-wheel, for the good wives talked no more before their doors; neighbour shrank from neighbour, fearing the slightest contact, and the few old gossips who lingered now and then in the grass-grown streets, where the rabbits and hares sported undismayed in the broad daylight, no longer exchanged their wonted cheerful, idle chat, but had only to tell in mournful whispers how the strange "white cricket" had been seen on such and such a one's now deserted hearth, and how the mournful baying of "Gabriel's hounds" had been heard at night beneath the windows of the latest victim of the disease.

The annual festival of rejoicing for the harvest, always held on St. Helen's Day, was this year quite forgotten. The church was closed, for it was deemed dangerous to crowd the people together

* "History of Eyam."

within its walls. No bells rang from the belfry; the very gates of the churchyard were closed, and the dead were buried in any open space of ground near their homes.

House after house was visited by the destroying angel; husband and wife, mother and child, young and old, were smitten down before him. Some sinking away in a deadly stupor, others racked with pain and tormented almost to the verge of madness by a raging fever. Relatives buried their own dead in the nearest field, until the last member of a family died, and then some friend or neighbour, or hired hand, hastily dug their narrow grave. From the 5th to the 30th of July perished the entire family of the fated Talbots of Riley, numbering seven persons. And early in August Elizabeth Hancock buried with her own hands her husband, three stalwart sons, and three blooming daughters. Strangely enough, though weakened by her awful watching, and prostrate with grief, she herself escaped the disease, passing the remainder of her days peacefully with her only surviving child, a son, who was at the time fortunately apprenticed in Sheffield.

Amid this scene of gloom and misery the only bright spot in the picture is in the figures of William and Catherine Mompesson going to and fro on tireless errands of mercy. All that skill or tenderness could do for their suffering people was done by that devoted couple, who went fearlessly in and out of the infected dwellings. Mompesson's own description, written shortly after the visitation was over, is so graphic that it cannot be omitted:

"The condition of this place was so sad that I persuade myself it did exceed *all history and example.* Our town hath become a Golgotha, the place of a skull; and had there not been a small remnant left we had been as Sodom and Gomorrah. My ears never heard such doleful lamentations. My nose never smelled such horrid smells, and my eyes never beheld such ghastly spectacles. There have been seventy-six families visited within my parish, out of which 259 persons died."

Fearing any longer to hold service in the church, twice in the week, and every Sunday, Mompesson gathered together his fast-dwindling flock in the Delf, a picturesque and secluded little dell, where from an ivy-covered rock, which served as a rude pulpit, he spoke to them words of hope and cheer, and where, like Phineas of old, he stood up and poured forth his passionate prayer to God that the plague might be stayed.

The people sat below him on the grassy slope, each one a little removed from the other. The instinct of common sorrow which draws men together, the kind and sympathising voice of their one earthly friend, and their simple unwavering faith in their Heavenly Father, in whom, although He slew them, yet would they trust—brought them at each summons to their accustomed place. But their eyes were heavy with weakness, and dulled with unshed tears, their brains reeling at the greatness of the calamity that had befallen

them, and they had no strength left save to join, with faltering lips in their pastor's solemn and ceaseless supplication.

"*In all time of our tribulation . . . in the hour of death and in the day of Judgment: Good Lord, deliver us!*"

Mompesson kept in his usual health; although always "an ailing man," he yet seemed to bear a charmed life in the midst of the disease which overpowered strong and weak alike. But the sword of the Angel of Death was already stretched out over the peaceful Rectory. It was on the 22nd of August that Mompesson was walking, with his young wife on his arm—she was only twenty-six years of age—about the fields adjoining their home. They were talking the one to the other—possibly about their absent little ones—when she suddenly exclaimed, "Oh! the air—how sweet it smells!" At her words her husband's heart failed him, for already within his knowledge the same sensation and the same words had been a forerunner of the dread disease.

A few short hours proved all too soon the fatal truth. Vainly Mompesson sought every remedy, and nursed his darling with ceaseless and unremitting zeal. Love for her husband and her helpless children enabled her for a time to strive against her sickness, but her sorely-tried strength failed rapidly, and she died peacefully in her husband's arms. What an agony of grief rings out from the cry with which the sorrow-stricken man yielded up his treasure to his God—"Farewell—farewell all happy days!"

Catherine Mompesson's death stirred the whole remnant of the village from their dull apathy to quick and living sorrow. From every quarter they came, weeping for her who had so often wept for them, and forgetting their own deep griefs in the bitter calamity that had overtaken their Rector.

He buried his wife in Eyam churchyard, close to the east end of the chancel, and on her grave where the morning sunlight shines is still to be read the half-obliterated, significant inscription—

"MORS MIHI LUCRUM."

After she was laid to rest, Mompesson roused himself from his mourning to resume his labours among his people. In a letter to his children, dated Aug. 31, 1666, he pours out something of the trouble that was oppressing his soul:

"Dear Hearts," he writes, "this brings you the doleful news of your dear mother's death—the greatest loss that ever befell you. I am not only deprived of a kind and loving comfort, but you are also bereaved of the most indulgent mother that ever dear children had . . . . But we must comfort ourselves in God . . . . that the loss is only ours, and that what is our sorrow is her gain. The consideration of her joys, which I do assure myself are unutterable, should refresh our drooping spirits. My dear hearts, your blessed mother lived a

most holy life and made a most comfortable and happy end, and is now invested with a crown of righteousness."

Then he goes on to dwell with pathetic insistance on the virtues of that mother whose memory he would fain have live in her children's hearts—her piety and devotion, "which were according to the exact principles of the Church of England"—her modesty and humility, her charity and frugality, her housewifely zeal. "Her discourse ever grave and meek, yet pleasant withal."

Writing to his friend and patron, Sir George Saville, on Sept. 1, Mompesson says:

"Dear and honoured Sir,—This is the saddest news that ever my pen could write. The destroying Angel having taken up his quarters within my habitation, my dearest wife is gone to her eternal rest, and is invested with a crown of righteousness, having made a happy end. Indeed, had she loved herself as well as me, she had fled from this pit of destruction with the sweet babes, and might have prolonged her days; but she was resolved to die a martyr to my interests."

That he considered his own end must be rapidly approaching is evident from the terms in which he commends his children to his patron's care, and takes farewell of him and all his house; his letter closes with the following words:

"Dear Sir, I beg the prayers of all about you that I may not be daunted at the powers of hell, and that I may have dying graces; with tears I beg that when you are praying for fatherless orphans you will remember my two pretty babes."

But it was not to be. The death of Catherine Mompesson may be considered as the closing act of the terrible drama. In September the weather became slightly cooler, and the number of deaths only amounted to twenty-four as against the seventy-three that had perished in August alone. On the 11th of October the wind shifted to the east, and the plague suddenly and entirely ceased. From that day there were no fresh deaths, and the remnant of the little village began slowly to take heart again, and to try to restore in some measure their ruined homes. Out of a population of 350 no less than 267 had died—259 of plague, according to Mompesson, and the remaining eight of other diseases; therefore the entire muster of the once happy and prosperous hamlet numbered only 83 souls, including the Rector himself, and such of the children as had escaped the epidemic. The winter months were spent in destroying, as far as possible, bedding, clothing, and furniture, and purifying and fumigating all necessary articles of apparel; while every means that the sanitary knowledge of the time, and the forethought of Mompesson could suggest, was adopted to prevent a recurrence of the disease.

Writing to his uncle on November 20th, he says:

"Now (blessed be God) all our fears are over, for none have died of plague since the 11th of October, and the pest houses have long been empty. I intend—God willing—to spend this week in seeing

all the woollen clothing fumed and purified, as well for the satisfaction as for the safety of the country. Here have been such burning of goods that the like I think was never known. For my part, I have scarcely apparel to shelter my body, having wasted more than I needed for the sake of example. During this dreadful visitation I have not had the least symptom of disease, nor had I ever better health."

A village ravaged by soldiery or destroyed by fire could hardly have presented a more piteous and desolate aspect than that of Eyam at this period. The people, shattered in health and oppressed with sadness, crept languidly about the streets, and began slowly and fitfully to resume their ordinary avocations. In almost every homestead there must have been some missing face, "some vacant chair," and many of the houses were utterly closed and falling into ruins, for those who had once inhabited them had arisen and gone hence, and the place thereof would know them no more.

Still, as the days passed on, bringing the assurance that the plague was at last overcome, the little band would begin to gather hope again. Dull eyes would brighten, neighbour again seek neighbour, instead of shrinking from all communication with their kind, and the happy quick-forgetting laugh of the children would once more be heard; while here and there one and another from the surrounding hamlets would venture to cross that formidable barrier, to see how it fared with the good people of Eyam, and who was living, and who, alas! was dead.

The re-opening of the long-closed church must have been quite an event, and the sound of the old familiar chimes ringing out on the still frosty air their solemn message, *Jesus bee ovr spede*, must have wakened countless memories—thoughts both of pain and thankfulness—in the hearts of those who had never hoped to hear them again.

To this period belongs the sad and romantic little story of "Rowland and his Emmot," still carefully remembered among the village traditions. A gentle pretty girl, Emmot Sydall of Eyam, was betrothed to a young farmer living in Middleton Dale. The outburst of the plague of course separated the lovers, for the young man apparently had those at home to whom he dared not run the risk of bringing infection. Rumours of Emmot's death reached him, but he hardly seemed to have credited them, and as soon as ingress was permitted he passed the fatal line, and sought the once bright and cheerful cottage. He crossed the grass-grown threshold—no one answered his summons, and only his own voice echoed hollowly through the deserted house. The half-open door swung creaking back on its rusty hinges. All was still, the chairs and tables stood in their accustomed places covered with dust, and on the black and desolate hearth the rank grass was growing and the green damp moss was creeping silently from brick to brick of the red tiled floor. The pewter vessels were flecked with rust; the old Dutch clock was

pointing with mournful finger to a bygone hour—the linnet lay dead in its cage—only the shadow of death and decay brooded over all things. For a stronger wooer than Rowland had claimed his Emmot; she lay asleep in the grassy dell, and neither his love nor his tears could bring her back to him.

A few scattered hints remain as to Mompesson's subsequent history, which after that year of fiery trial seems to have been peaceful and uneventful. He remained at Eyam until 1669, when he was presented to the Rectory of Eakring, Notts. He was made Prebendary of York and Southwell, having previously refused, in favour of a friend, the Deanery of Lincoln. It is somewhat disappointing to find that he married again, and yet it is pleasant to think of him once more with a happy home, and little children round him. Of George and Elizabeth Mompesson but little is known. The former took Orders, and was Rector of Barnborough; but whatever their after-career, the children of such parents could scarcely fail to realise their father's prayer, uttered for them in the extremity of his sorrow—"I am not desirous that they should be great, but good." Mompesson died at Eakring in 1708, in the seventieth year of his age. His body rests in the chancel of Eakring Church, "in the hope of a blessed resurrection," and his memory is a deathless heritage to his race.

Such is the story of the Dalesmen of Eyam: a story of patient endurance, of steadfast and unselfish heroism on the part of an entire community, which is perhaps almost unique among the records of the past.

The praise of men, the wondering admiration of the world of later days, which probably in their own time counted their lives madness and their deaths without honour, had no part in the thoughts of these simple dalesmen, as they turned at that solemn appeal and went back every man to his own house. Of what should be said of them in the days to come, and of how their memory would shed a lustre round their tiny unknown village that would never fade away, they knew and recked but little. They only knew that they heard the voice of their Lord cutting across their questionings and fears, and calling to them to follow Him as He called His disciples of old. And they did follow Him, nothing wavering, along that bitter way of the Cross which led them through the grave and gate of death into everlasting life.

"*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.*"

To sit down patiently with empty hands and wait the coming of death in one of its most terrible and hideous forms, requires a courage, surely, as deep and strong as to face the torturer's rack, the scathing fire, and the glittering axe and sword. And among the glorious martyrs of God not least perhaps in the Kingdom of Heaven are some of those men and women who sleep for the most part in nameless graves sown broadcast over the green and fertile fields of Eyam.

THE SEÑORITA'S GHOST.

"YOU see that quaint little mound," said Doña Pilar; "that is the Señorita's grave."

"She never rests there," growled José Maria. "She is doing penance."

"Why?" asked the young Englishman, Mark Lairt.

She was bad—very bad!"

"How do you know that, José Maria?" said the old lady sharply, swinging round on him, and throwing back her head. She was strangely excited, and clutched her neck convulsively with one black-gloved hand.

"I know it because I know it," answered José Maria mumblingly; "and Heaven knows best of all."

"Who are you, José Maria, to prate of what Heaven knows? Shut your mouth and learn reverence."

The old man turned aside muttering, but he dared not argue with the Señora.

Then she swung herself round with the same jerky movement as before, and spoke to the young Englishman beside her.

"How would you like to be buried here?"

He looked rather surprised at the question, and the old lady laughed horribly.

"Here!" he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I would rather lay my bones in England."

"Be thankful," retorted she sharply—"be thankful if you get as good as this. My grandfather was eaten by fierce pigs. They killed him too!"

"Good Heavens! how did that happen?"

"My grandmother kept fierce pigs and—well, she was jealous. Now let us go on."

She swung round again, and led the way through a tangle of garden that by daylight was brilliant with crimson passion-flowers and hibiscus, and fragrant with tall shrubs of sweet-scented verbena and rosemary. The nispero trees were bowing down with luscious yellow fruit, and the cherries blushed amongst their green leaves.

The house stood at one end of the garden, where a fountain dripped lazily, and frogs were already croaking in the evening light.

"Who was the Señorita?" asked Mark Lairt, with a sudden uncontrollable desire to know.

The old lady swung round angrily.

"It's no matter to you, Mark Lairt! Ask nothing, and you will hear no lies."

They passed through a creeper-grown verandah, and entered the

house. It was a low, old-fashioned, straggling *hacienda* house, built round a *patio*. The flooring was of red tiles, broken and uneven. The furniture was scanty, shabby, and quaintly old-fashioned.

Mark looked about him with interest. This, then, was his heritage. Years ago, when he was a mere child, a letter had come from his uncle Mark, of whom the family had heard nothing for half a century, saying that he had buried himself in this remote corner of Chile, and that his property and fortune should eventually belong to the boy Mark, who, he particularly requested, should be taught Spanish thoroughly. Then he wrote again, some ten years later, saying he felt death was near, and bidding Mark wait until he had attained the age of twenty-five before coming to claim his heritage, unless he should be summoned before that time, by the death of his aunt, who was a Chilian, in which case he should be duly informed of the event.

From that day there came no further communication, beyond the news of the old man's death; and Mark, in course of time, being unable to obtain any answer to his letters, had, when he reached the age of twenty-five, announced his intention of visiting his aunt, and had at last arrived at the out-of-the-way *hacienda* on the frontier where she lived.

After riding about ten miles from the nearest station, leaving his baggage to follow him on a pack-mule, he and his guide—a taciturn Chilian *huaso*, or countryman—found themselves before a tumble-down gate, leading into the tangle of garden already described, where they first saw the old lady.

"I know who you are," she had said at once. "You are Mark Lairt, come to get what you can."

"I have come in accordance with my uncle's wishes," said he, speaking in Spanish, which he knew perfectly. "You are my aunt."

The old lady laughed a horrible laugh.

"Ave Maria! Your aunt!"

She was a strange-looking old lady, with a very erect and graceful way of holding herself. She appeared to be slight and well-made, but her figure was shrouded in a long black jacket, that gave her a quaint aspect. Over this she wore a thick black gauze *manto*, which covered her head, and was drawn down over her face like a veil. Mark could see no feature distinctly, and even her eyes were barricaded by large blue spectacles. She had a wonderfully elastic, springy walk, and an energetic yet graceful way of swinging herself round to speak to any one. Mark, as he stood hat in hand, holding his horse by the gate, and greeting this odd old lady, thought it was a strange experience, and instinctively felt that he was an unwelcome guest.

"You can send your guide away," said Doña Pilar decidedly. "He can have nothing here. José Mar-i-a! José Ma-ri-a!" she shouted loudly, in a strong, clear voice.

A shrivelled old man appeared, an old man with red and bleared eyes, and a toothless, mumbling mouth. He was dressed in a red and yellow striped *poncho*, which hung loosely over his sharp shoulders, and a flapping white *chupaya* hat was tied by greasy black ribbons under his stubbly chin.

"José Maria," Doña Pilar had said then, "take the horse."

José Maria took it, and stood waiting. Mark pulled out some money and paid his guide, explaining that he must return at once, and asking him to send on the luggage as soon as possible. Though he tipped the man well, it went to his heart to send off man and beast without refreshment.

"Let him take back the horse, too," said the old lady. "There are plenty here without it. Now follow me."

Mark walked along the garden path behind her, and was joined in a few minutes by José Maria, who had delivered up the horse, and who came hobbling after them.

And then it was that the old lady suddenly stopped, swung herself round to speak to Mark, and pointed out the Señorita's grave.

When they entered the house, Doña Pilar turned to Mark again. "A fine heritage!" she said derisively. "Come, I will show you your room."

They passed through the *patio*, where the pavement was green with age, and the damp that oozed from a stagnant pool, which had once been the ornamental basin of a fountain, now all broken and leaking. The Señora led the way through an empty room, into another *patio* beyond; their footsteps echoed strangely in the deserted place, and rats scurried away disturbed by the sound. Doña Pilar pulled out a rusty key, and opened a door. The room into which they entered had that peculiar damp, musty smell that comes in rooms with *adobe* walls, that have been too much shut up. Mark walked to the window and looked out. The moon had risen and poured in its pale light just as the day suddenly waned.

"A pretty old garden," said Mark, trying hard to be pleasant.

At the same instant something gleaming caught his eye. It was the moonlight on the white stone of the Señorita's grave.

The old woman laughed the same horrible laugh.

"This is the Señorita's room," she said. "I have given it to you."

Then she went out suddenly and shut the door. Mark looked round the room. A heavy wooden bedstead stood in one corner. It had been a four-poster once, but the top had been cut off. There was a shabby chest of drawers, and a shabbier cupboard, two chairs and an old wash-hand stand. A door led out of the room on either side, communicating with the next rooms, as is usual in *patio* houses. Mark tried one door. It was locked: the other had the heavy cupboard in front of it, reaching to the top of the frame, but not covering the small window above the door, which disfigures most Chilian

rooms, and which very often is not made to open, and cannot even serve the original intention of ventilation.

The French window which led to the verandah, had neither curtains, blinds, shutters nor fastenings of any sort. He threw it wide open, and stood looking out: the Señorita's grave had a sort of fascination for him. Who was the Señorita? He had never heard of any one except his uncle and aunt. His uncle was dead, and his aunt was the strange old lady; but who was the Señorita?

He was startled out of his meditations by the sound of a cracked dinner-bell. Mark looked at his watch, and found that it was already long past seven o'clock—a wonderfully late hour for the *hacienda* dinner, which had evidently been postponed for him. He could make little toilet, for his luggage had not yet arrived; so, still in his riding gear, he soon crossed the damp *patio*, where the frogs were croaking loudly, and the bats were wheeling and circling in the shadow.

"There does not seem to be a living soul here, except the Señora and José Maria," thought Mark, and he subsequently found he was right. José Maria cooked and served the dinner—a terribly greasy meal; José Maria made the beds; José Maria watered the garden. There was not another soul.

"This way," cried the Señora's voice to Mark, as he hesitated where to go. "Here is the dining-room."

He entered a long low room with a bare tiled floor, lighted by one small window almost covered with white flowering jessamine. There was a long deal table, with a piece of dirty brown American cloth at one end, where two places were laid, with common white plates, coarse tumblers, grimy-handled knives and folks and spoons. Mark wondered what had become of the old family silver, of which he had heard his uncle had a large store.

He was young and strong, and roughing it had no difficulties for him. He rather enjoyed the experience, and wondered what was coming next. The room was very dark: the whole house was dark, and he could hardly see the Señora; but he noticed that she still wore a sort of veil, and that the black gloves had not been taken off. "Perhaps that is just as well," thought the young man, philosophically.

José Maria brought in a paraffin lamp that smoked and smelt horribly. Then he popped down a big basin of *casuela*, in which floated islands of grease in a thick yellow fluid. José Maria poured out the beer, which was even viler than the *casuela*, and José Maria's own fair hands plumped down a bit of bread beside each plate.

Mark was a philosopher; he merely made up his mind that more than a fair average of the proverbial peck of dirt would have to be eaten during his stay at the hacienda.

Suddenly the old lady startled him by breaking the silence.

"Only you and I and the Señorita's ghost!"

"Where is the ghost?" asked Mark, calmly.

"You find out for yourself, Mark Lairt, and don't ask questions," said she.

José Maria begun mumbling to himself as he served.

"She rests little enough in her grave. That know I—none better than I." Then he gave a sudden chuckle, and as suddenly grew grave again.

The Señora said nothing.

"How large is the farm, Señora?" by way of again breaking the silence. For the life of him, Mark could not bring himself to call the horrible old woman "aunt."

"You wait till I am dead, Mark Lairt—dead and buried, and then find out for yourself. You are not 'patron' here yet."

"Not yet," repeated José Maria, like a ghostly echo.

"Señora, you misunderstand me. I only wish to find a subject that interests you."

"Shut your mouth and say nothing, Mark Lairt! You are a fool, as your uncle was before you."

"*Caramba!*" said José Maria, unexpectedly. "A fool! A fool!"

"Shut your mouth, too, José Maria," she cried angrily. "Do you want to be out there too—out there, where the Señorita's grave is?"

"What must be, must be; but the Señorita was a devil."

"Prating old fool! Devils don't die."

"*Quien sabe?* Who knows?" said the old man, and he nodded his head significantly. "That's what I think myself—devils don't die."

Then he put a fowl down before the Señora, who carved it with an ease that told of strong muscles.

She only spoke one other word to Mark during dinner, and that was "More?" jerking her head upwards, and looking first at Mark and then at the dish.

The only thing that Mark found palatable was the fruit, and it was delicious and abundant.

"Now smoke," said the Señora, suddenly getting up, when the meal was over; "and go to bed when you like. Good-night!"

So Mark went out, and sat among the passion-flowers in the verandah, for it was pleasanter than the stuffy, fusty rooms. He wished he could hear a little more than the Señora seemed inclined to tell him about his heritage, and he wondered how he could get hold of his uncle's will, and find out what was really coming to him, so as to take it and clear out as fast as he could.

Then he began to wonder about the Señorita. Certainly there was a mystery concerning her, and he sat and smoked and mused in the glorious moonlight. Suddenly his quick eye noticed a moving shadow just below the verandah, which was raised several feet above

the level of the garden, and was approached by steps. He got up and looked over, and there, with the moonshine full on it, he saw the upturned face of a very beautiful woman, with strange and lovely eyes. Her figure was lost in the shadow. In an instant Mark had vaulted over the railing, and alighted in the garden below, but the face was gone. He hunted round, and could see nothing, except that a tiny door in the brickwork below the verandah was now tightly closed, and he could swear it had been half-open when he passed it, on first entering the house.

"By Jove! the Señorita's ghost!" said he to himself. "The poor Señorita!"

He fancied he heard a soft sigh somewhere, but not a sign of the ghost was to be seen.

In a few minutes he heard in the distant *patio* the Señora's voice calling angrily, "José Maria!—José Maria, you old fool, go to bed. You will be sleeping too late in the morning, José Maria."

Mark listened to the sound of the old man's tottering footsteps; then they died away, and he lit another cigarette, and sat watching in hopes that the Señorita's ghost would appear again. But he grew tired, and went off to bed, healthy and sleepy, and untroubled by nerves, or by the dead Señorita or the living Señora.

His portmanteau had arrived by now, and as he was stooping and unpacking it, by the light of the moon, which streamed in through the open window, he suddenly became conscious of the uncanny feeling that he was being watched. He looked up quickly, and distinctly saw to his surprise, in the narrow window above the door, behind the wardrobe, the same beautiful sad face watching him. It disappeared into the shadow when their eyes met.

"I don't mind betting," said Mark to himself, "that there has been foul play here. I believe the old demon herself murdered the Señorita."

Then he undressed and went to bed, and slept the dreamless sleep of youth and health, but the last thing his eyes rested on that night, and the first thing they saw in the morning—at night bathed in silvery moonshine, in the morning glowing in golden sunshine—was the white stone, and the quaint mound of the Señorita's grave.

II.

The next morning Mark was awakened by the sunlight that streamed in through the window. He jumped up and began to wonder about the ways and means of tubbing, and sallied forth in pursuit of José Maria.

The old man was lighting up the kitchen fire when Mark explained his requirements.

"*Caramba!* just like the old patron," said the old man gazing at

him with a sort of faint admiration in his looks. "*Caramba!*" you are like him too, Patroncito, and he, yes, he had the good heart. He gave me flannel when my pains were bad, and good cognac—good cognac! Ave Maria! how good it was to warm up the stomach."

"All right, José Maria, you and I shall get along first-rate too, I am sure. You go and buy your flannels the next time you go to town, and I will see after the cognac. There's something for you."

"What is it?" mumbled the old fellow, trembling with excitement; "ten dollars! Ave Maria! Do not tell the Señora. God will repay you, Patroncito—God and the blessed Virgin; and I will serve you—yes, you will see."

"What about the bath?"

"*Diantre!* there is the old patron's bath, but the Señora would kill me if I took you there," and he chuckled to himself quietly. "Better go to the *estanque*—the big tank up above the garden."

"All right; but why can I not have my uncle's bath?"

"Because," said the old man mysteriously, lowering his voice nervously—"because"—then he looked round furtively, and even glanced over his shoulders, though he was standing with his back to the wall—"there is the room next door."

"What of that?"

"Leave that room alone, Patroncito; better have nothing to do with it. Let the devil look after his own work."

"José Mar-i-a—José Ma-ri-a," shouted Doña Pilar in the front *patio*.

"*Ya voy!* I am coming"; and the old man hobbled off.

"Where is the *estanque*, José Maria?" Mark called after him, determined to have his bath come what might.

"Up the hill behind the garden, where the willows grow, Patroncito."

Mark had not much difficulty in finding it; and after a refreshing swim in the reservoir, which was shaded by the willows, whose green foliage formed a deliciously cool screen, he made his way back to the house again, entering by a back door, which he found open, and which was an evident short cut.

As he passed through another back yard, which he had not seen before, he looked unconsciously into a small room, and saw to his surprise that it was a comparatively comfortably fitted-up bath-room, evidently long disused.

"By Jove! the bath-room!" thought Mark, stepping in, inspired with curiosity by the old man's words.

A strange odour pervaded the place. It was different from anything he had ever smelt before, and it struck him as an extraordinary mixture of antiseptics and corruption. He looked round, but there was nothing to account for it. Then he noticed a door leading into another room, and, approaching it, found that the strong smell, whatever it might be, came from that direction. "Perhaps she

concocts some horrible medicines, or something; dried black cats and owls; who knows?" thought Mark; "and that is why she does not like any one to know about it."

Then it struck him that it would be easy to see into the room from the verandah, and he had the curiosity to go round and try. But the window was completely closed by boards, which were evidently nailed from the inside.

He went back to his own room, and finished dressing, then he made his way to the dining-room.

"You had better take a cup of tea and some bread, Mark Lairt," said the Señora, who sat there in the dim light, for the creepers over the small window almost darkened the room. "There is no butter here," she went on.

Mark said politely that it was not of the slightest consequence.

"How long are you going to stay, Mark Lairt?" said Doña Pilar.

He saw his opportunity, and told her that he was merely waiting her pleasure to discuss affairs, take what he was entitled to and be off.

The Señora looked at him triumphantly, he fancied. "And the will, Mark Lairt?"

"And the will," he repeated quietly.

"You are powerless without the will, fool."

"That remains to be proved, Doña Pilar; if you are unwilling to enlighten me, I suppose my uncle's lawyer will do so."

"The old lawyer is dead, and there is no other, Mark Lairt. You had better go home, and wait until I am dead. You are not patron yet."

"Why, Doña Pilar," replied he good-naturedly, "you might live a hundred years. I am entitled to my share, whatever it is, irrespective of you. Remember I am twenty-five."

"Twenty-five—Ave Maria! twenty-five. If I had had you to bring up, you would never have reached twenty-five."

"You are very kind, Doña Pilar," laughingly, "but here I am a living certainty, and I am twenty-five."

"My grandfather was eaten up by pigs," said she slowly—"killed and eaten by horrible pigs, fierce pigs, because a woman wished it so."

"I have not seen any about here though, Señora."

Doña Pilar jumped up, and swung out of the room. "José Mar-i-a—José Ma-ri-a," she shouted, and went off to find him.

A few minutes later, José Maria put his head round the door of the dining-room, then stole in and shut it noiselessly.

"Patroncito," said he mysteriously, "she is dressing to ride to town. She is after the money." He bent down, and began to pull off an old worn boot full of holes.

"Poor old beggar," thought Mark; "a shame to let an old man like that go about with such boots." Then he asked José if he had no money to buy clothes with

"Not a cent since the old patron died. Not a half cent. Food and lodging only, food and—lodging;" the word came out with a jerk, caused by the effort in getting off his boot.

"Here," said Mark, giving him some money, "get yourself some boots, man."

The old fellow waved it aside. "It is not that, Patroncito"—he had pulled off a terribly old sock by now—"it is *this*," and out of the sock he produced a small packet. "I have carried this eight long years for you. The patron gave it to me before he died. 'When the Patroncito comes, it will be in eight years, José Maria,' he said. 'I can trust no one here, not even the lawyer; but I can trust you.' And every year, I have cut a notch here on this very door, on the morning of the *purisima* when he died—here on this very door, Patroncito, for in this very room he gave it to me."

Mark took the packet with an exclamation of astonishment, and pushed some money into the old withered hand. "Wait, Patroncito," whispered José Maria in a terrified whisper, "for the love of Heaven, do not open it until she is gone. The dead and the living have eyes."

Then he shuffled away, and Mark saw him in a few minutes leading round two horses. The Señora mounted one, and the old man the other. Mark, who had intended to go too, whether she wished it or not, in order to find out something about the money, was now only too glad to see her off, and have a quiet time to look at the packet.

"I leave you," said Doña Pilar, "to the Señorita's ghost." And so saying, she rode off, with the sound of horrible laughter.

Mark went back to the verandah, and taking out his pocket-knife, cut the string of the sealed packet. The outside covering was of oil-silk, and the letter inside was clean and well preserved.

It was from his uncle. The letter contained a statement of affairs, and proved, to Mark's astonishment, that he had come in for a sum of dollars that was equivalent to £100,000, in bonds and hard cash; and the property, and a comfortable annuity left to his aunt, were also to fall to him at her death. There was besides a legacy of 50,000 dollars to Madelina, whom Mark concluded must have been the Señorita, and fifty dollars a month was to be paid to his faithful servant José Maria, in order that he should work no more, but end his days in peace.

"Poor old fellow!" thought Mark; "much money or much peace he has had since that old demon took up the reins. Why, there is about 5000 dollars owing him by now. Never mind! My lady, I think I am about even with you now. I should not mind laying an even bet that you murdered the Señorita."

Then he lit a cigar and began to think what was the best course to pursue; and being a man of decision and having made up his mind that the Señora was up to no good, he went out, caught the best looking horse he could see in the *corral*, saddled it, and started off to town

He did not hurry himself much, as he did not want to overtake Doña Pilar and awake her suspicions. So he rode leisurely.

It was an hour and a half before he reached the little town, and the heat was intense by this time. He asked his way to the bank, and went there first to make inquiries. He found, scarcely to his surprise, that for the last year, the Señora had been drawing the money out as quickly as possible, and that she had long since carried away the strong box, containing the bonds, jewellery and other valuables, which had been deposited there by his uncle. She had already visited the bank that day and had drawn out the last of the cash.

As no one had ever heard of the will, the bank manager had imagined that it was all right, and that the Señora was sole heir, for there had been no one to dispute the fact; but they all felt greatly puzzled to know what the old lady had done with the money.

Mark produced the will and explained the circumstances. "She must have the money in the house," said the bank manager, "for it is impossible that she has taken it away. She knows no one."

Then he advised Mark to take the advice of the best lawyer in Chile, adding that he would need a pretty sharp one to outwit the Señora. "It is only within the last year that we have seen much of her. The Señorita used to manage everything."

"Who was the Señorita?" asked Mark. But he could get little satisfaction, for no one knew much about her. She was supposed to be the daughter of Doña Pilar's first husband, for the Señora was a widow when Mark's uncle had married her late in life, and Madelina had come to live in the *hacienda* when Doña Pilar became mistress there. She had died very suddenly about thirteen months before Mark's visit. She was a very beautiful woman.

Of one thing, and one thing only, Mark felt sure, and that was that she had met with foul play, and that her memory was much maligned.

He rode quickly back to the *hacienda*, his head full of projects, and arrived at the house before Doña Pilar had returned. He unsaddled his horse, groomed it, fed it, and turned it into the *corral*; then went to sit and smoke in the verandah.

"If the Señorita's ghost is about," he thought to himself, "now is her time."

But though he sat there for a good hour, he never saw a sign of the beautiful face that had made such an impression on him.

In course of time the Señora and José Maria returned.

"I hope you have had a pleasant day, Señora," said he, meaningly.

"A pleasanter day than you are ever likely to have, Mark Lairt," said she.

"Look here, Señora, you and I need not waste many words between us. I, too, have been to the bank; I want to know what you have done with my uncle's money—with my money?

José Maria, who had crept up noiselessly, gave a startlingly sudden cackle, and as suddenly grew grave.

"Go off about your business, old fool!" said the Señora sharply, "or you will laugh the wrong way. And you, Mark Lairt, where is the will?"

"I know where the will is, Señora, and you know where the money is, and I mean to have it."

His words evidently took her aback. "What imp gave you the will?"

"Never you mind, Señora; all you have to do is to give up my money."

But the Señora rushed past him suddenly, and Mark saw her no more that evening, for José Maria, with a grim chuckle, came and bade him dine alone. The Señora was indisposed.

Mark had a quiet dinner, and went to bed early. His window, as usual, stood wide open, but the moon was not yet up. Mark got into bed, and began to read, but before long, the same uncontrollable desire to look up came over him, and raising his eyes, he saw, as he expected, the beautiful pale sad face with the strange eyes, the face of the Señorita's ghost again watching him, and again it disappeared when their eyes met.

"Madelina," he called, impelled by a strong desire to speak to her—"Madelina!" She did not reappear, though he waited and waited in hopes of seeing her again. He could read no more, the book had lost its interest for him, and at last he put out the light and went to sleep.

Mark awoke with a consciousness that something was happening. He opened his eyes, and looked out through the open window. The moon had gone down now, and it was dark, very dark. But moving about outside, in the direction of the Señorita's grave, he saw for a moment the faint twinkle of a light, that suddenly came and as suddenly disappeared. He sprang out of bed and crept into the garden.

His heart was beating violently, for he felt that he was about to discover the truth concerning the injured dead. The young man had a strange Quixotic feeling, that he would like to clear the Señorita's name, to prove that the beautiful pleading face that haunted him belonged to a good and maligned woman, who had been foully done to death, and not to, as José Maria said, a devil.

As he approached the grave, he saw the moving light more clearly, but it was stationary now, standing on the ground, and he recognised it as a dark lantern. He did not go near, but, screened by some shrubs, stood quietly waiting and watching the weird scene. Mark saw it was the Señora, for though her face was hidden, the light fell full on her figure, and she was—he found to his horror—like some terrible loathsome vampire, digging up the Señorita's grave. His blood ran cold. There was the cruel murderess, not content with her

horrible work, but even after the death of her victim bent on insulting the wretched body. He could see her stooping over the place where the poor Señorita lay; stooping and digging; until he heard the thud of the spade hitting upon something which resounded to the blow. It was the coffin. Then the fiend, for woman he could not think her, bent forward triumphantly and forced open the lid with wonderfully little difficulty, looked in, and seemingly gloated over what lay there. Then she turned round, and, lifting a small black box that stood on the ground beside her, put it into the coffin. Mark saw her noiselessly clap her hands, and dance a weird and ghastly witch dance of triumph and joy round the grave. She stooped, and twirled, and twisted, and capered, like a hag distraught, waving her arms and gesticulating silently, and laughing a terrible mirthless laugh, low and almost beneath her breath. Then she quietly shut the lid and fastened it, threw a few spadefuls of earth over the coffin, and scraped it together with the spade. Her strength seemed almost superhuman as she replaced the heavy blocks of stone that covered the grave, finally smoothing the disturbed earth round the edges that no trace should be left to betray her. Mark, when he saw that she had almost finished, slipped noiselessly and quickly back to his room, and from his bed watched the twinkling light come slowly up the garden. As he expected, it approached his room, and the Señora stood quietly at the window, as if to listen. She flashed the lantern in his face, but he never blenched and lay with closed eyes, apparently sound asleep, until the old woman stole away as she had come.

But Mark could not sleep: the horrible scene haunted him; and he was puzzled to know what to do. Of two things he felt convinced; first, that Madelina had been murdered by Doña Pilar; and secondly, that the old woman had hidden the stolen money in her victim's coffin.

Suddenly, while tossing about restlessly, he heard a strange sound. Some one was moving in the house now.

Mark listened intently. What it was, he could not say, but it seemed as if some very heavy weight were being dragged along the floor. Burning with curiosity he jumped out of bed again, but just as he opened his door he heard the sound of footsteps slow and laboured, as if heavily burdened. He peeped out cautiously, and saw first the faint glimmer of light, as the Señora approached, crossing the side of the *patio* opposite to his room, and then her muffled figure with the lantern fastened to her head, in some way, while she, with both hands, dragged along what appeared to be a sack; and at the same time the house became permeated with the strange odour. Mark watched her disappear into her own room, and pull the sack inside too, but she did not shut the door. In a few minutes she slipped out again, and passed to the far *patio*. Mark followed cautiously, making no sound. The Señora disappeared into the

room next the bath-room. Then there came a noise as of something heavy being pushed along the floor, and Doña Pilar emerged with a long case which she pulled behind by means of two ropes. Mark was curious to know what it was, and felt convinced that it was some of his stolen property. He slipped back to his own room, and watched the proceedings through a chink of the door, as before. When the old lady passed, Mark saw that it was a long-shaped case with sacking fastened round the middle, but he could make out nothing more. Doña Pilar reached her own door at last, and the case being long, was awkward to pull round the corner. One end struck sharply against a small cupboard that stood in front of the Señora's door, and served as a stand for a filtering stone. She turned round and bent down, the light falling full on the case. Mark saw to his horror that it was a black coffin. He could even see the point of a white cross painted on the lid, and just showing beneath the sacking. Doña Pilar pulled it in with little difficulty, and shut and locked her door.

Mark went back to bed more puzzled and horror-stricken than ever. He felt on the eve of some even more terrible discovery, and hardly closed an eye all night. But no further sounds reached him, though he listened long and intently, and the mystery seemed very deep.

He feel asleep at last, and slept long and late, the heavy sleep that often follows a wakeful night. When he roused himself, he found to his surprise that it was nine o'clock. He got up and went out to his open-air bath, and returned refreshed and glowing. As he passed the kitchen regions old José Maria hobbled up, and said, with a sudden chuckle: "The Señora is indisposed still, Patroncito. You will not see her to-day. The devil is about," he added significantly.

Then Mark asked him what he meant.

"What will be, will be," he answered vaguely; and hurried away.

Mark took his morning *disayuno*, or breakfast of tea and bread, and soon sauntered down the garden on pretence of smoking, but really to examine the Señorita's grave. He could see the freshly-turned earth, just showing at the edges of the stone, but to the uninitiated there was not a sign to tell the tale of desecration.

Musing deeply, Mark walked up and down under the shade of the peomo trees, and listened to the ceaseless calls of the wild birds. And then, glancing up by chance, his quick eye caught sight for a moment of the pale beautiful face, set in a halo of green and feathery foliage, and, as before, watching him intently. It was the face that was in his heart continually, the face of the Señorita's ghost.

"Madelina, Madelina," he cried, holding out his arms. "What is it, tell me? For the love of heaven tell me."

The white face flushed with a look of ineffable sweetness, and vanished. Mark fancied he heard a light footstep, and thought there

was a sound of rustling leaves, but it was only imagination, for no sign of anything could he find. He searched the garden feverishly; he called quietly, but it was all in vain.

Unable to bear the inaction and suspense any longer, Mark took a horse and rode to the town again, and went to see his new friend, the bank-manager, who was a pleasant young Englishman, a little more than his own age. He still hesitated as to the advisability of taking a lawyer's advice about the matter of the money, being, to tell the truth, principally anxious to first discover for himself the secret of the Señorita's fate.

He rode back and reached the *hacienda* very late; it was already dark. He unsaddled his horse, and, as usual, groomed and fed it himself, and turned it into the corral. Then he went in.

José Maria met him. "The Señora is dead," said he shortly.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mark. "Dead? What is it? What do you mean? How terribly sudden!"

"A matter of thirteen months."

"What do you mean, José Maria?"

But the old man was chuckling and mumbling to himself childishly.

"Come in, come in and see her. She is laid out fine. She said you were to come. The devil said so."

Mark followed amazed.

José Maria threw wide open the door of the Señora's bedroom. The curtains, for it had curtains, had been drawn, and the room was very dark, except for four candles at the four corners of an open coffin that stood on trestles. The lid, with a white painted cross, lay on the ground at one side. Mark recognised it instantly.

"Go and look! Go and look!" whispered José Maria.

The young man mastered his repugnance, and drew near; at the same time repelled and attracted with a horrible attraction.

He drew back with a start.

"What! Great Heavens! That!—that!—that is not the Señora!"

For in the coffin lay a terrible, awesome, dried-up mummy-like corpse; a frightful, distorted, shrunken thing.

And then came a strangely light step, and a gentle rustling sound that made Mark look up. There, on the other side of that terrible body, stood the beautiful, swaying figure, of which, until now, he had not seen the face, the figure of the Señorita's ghost.

Mark forgot everything; forgot the horror, the dreadful corpse, the awful mystery, and undoubted crime of it all—forgot everything but that beautiful woman.

"Madelina! Madelina! for the love of heaven speak to me! Tell me who you are!"

In an instant he was beside her, and found no fading, fleeting ghostly shadow, but the warm, living presence of a glorious woman.

"Tell me, trust me! Madelina, trust me! Let me save you from this horrible life. For God's sake, trust me! I love you! Oh! my soul! I love you!"

His heart, his chivalry, his manhood, and his very soul were stirred. He would save and protect her, this beautiful and maligned creature; he would deliver her from this living death.

And then she spoke.

"Dost thou love me, Mark?"

His answer was to catch her passionately in his arms. "Come out from this awful room," he whispered wildly. "Madelina, for Heaven's sake, come out."

"Mark, I love thee. I have loved thee since thou didst first come. I have watched and watched thee. But the Señora kept me imprisoned, and said I was *dead*, Mark—dead and buried. What could I do? Thou dost know how wicked she was. How hard and cruel to thee!"

"Oh, my love, it is all over! Come away. Have no more fear, for I will protect thee."

"She hated me so, Mark. Was it not strange that she could have no pity?"

"Strange! oh, my soul, terrible! impossible! The old fiend. She was a demon."

And then a strange chuckle made Mark look round; it sounded as if it came from the coffin; but it was from José Maria.

The old man seemed moved by some intense overmastering excitement; his eyes burned and gleamed; his face worked convulsively. He pointed his withered shaking hand at Madelina, and cried in a shrill clear voice:

"Demon! liar! I will speak the truth, and save my Patroncito."

"She, she, herself is the Señora! she murdered the old patrona thirteen months ago, and kept her preserved in the room next the bath-room; it was to get the money, and she has hidden it in the Señorita's——"

But before he could say the word, Madelina, with a terrible yell of madness, had torn herself from Mark and dashed upon the old man; upsetting the coffin, and throwing down two of the candles, in her headlong rush.

"Fool! I kill you;" and before Mark could stir to save him, she had plunged a dagger into José Maria's heart.

He sank down without a sound. Then the wretched woman turned to Mark.

"Mark! Mark! believe it not! Mark, my beloved, my soul! my heart!" she held out her white hands. "Say thou dost not believe it. Mark, I can restore thee the money, I can give thee all and more. Say thou dost not believe it."

"Stand back, murderess!—stand back! I *believe* it every word.'

For, as the old man was speaking, a thousand things sprang into

Mark's mind, and cried out, "It is the truth." The form, the figure, the action and voice of Madelina, the mystery of the room next the bathroom, and the horrible corpse—the whole thing seemed to be explained too clearly now. And whatever doubt might have been left in his mind, vanished, when he himself, with his own eyes, witnessed the murder of José Maria.

"Thou believest it! Thou lovest me not! Die then, fool, die!" and she dashed at him with her dagger.

But Mark was strong and well prepared. He caught her arm, and wrenched the dagger from her, flinging it far away into the *patio*, where it fell with a splash into the stagnant pool. And then ensued a frightful struggle, for the woman fought with the strength of a maniac. The white fingers clutched his throat, and it was almost more than he could do to free himself and overpower her. He dragged her out at last, and remembering that there was a storeroom next door which could be fastened firmly from the outside, managed to reach it, and thrust her in, and draw the heavy bolt.

He hurried away, leaving her beating wildly against the door, and filling the house with terrible laughter, and shrieks that made his blood run cold.

As he passed the Señora's room again he saw, by the light of the two candles that remained burning, the terrible mummy lying huddled up on the floor, half beneath the overturned coffin, and the corpse of José Maria stretched on the lid with the white painted cross that just showed beneath his poncho.

Mark hardly knew how he got to the corral and saddled his horse, but he only breathed freely when he found himself galloping at full speed along the narrow track that led to the town.

He drew rein at the bank manager's door, and dismounted more dead than alive. But he pulled himself together, and told his tale, and two hours later, the manager, the Sub-Delegado and six policemen, were galloping back with him to the scene of the murder

As they reached the top of the hill that overlooked the *hacienda* a lurid glare lit up the sky, and the valley was filled with dense smoke. The old house was in flames.

At the gate a troop of terrified horses that had jumped out of the corral stood huddled together trembling. They were the only living things there were near the house, for the farm buildings were at some distance off.

The front part of the house was already entirely destroyed, the roof had fallen in, and nothing but the burning walls remained glowing like a red hot oven. The dead and the living were gone. Victims and murderess had alike disappeared together.

Mark staggered up against his friend. "Keep up, man; it was the best thing that could happen. She was a raving maniac."

There was nothing to be done. The murderess had taken the law into her own hands, and set fire to the house. At least, that was

Mark's supposition; there was no other way to account for the fire, but neither he nor any one else would ever know the truth with certainty.

"And now," said the manager, "let us examine the Señorita's grave and find the money."

They set to work, raised the stone, and uncovered, not a coffin, but a large box, which contained, as was expected, a great many packets of money and valuables, and a small iron case which the manager recognised at once.

"I congratulate you," said he to Mark; "this is your heritage!"

There was over £120,000 in bonds and hard cash, besides jewellery, silver, and many other valuables.

Mark merely shook his friend's hand; he could not trust himself to speak. The money seemed as nothing now in his eyes. It was not worth one thousandth part of the awful experience he had just gone through. Wherever he looked, wherever he turned, he was haunted continually by the thought of that beautiful face, and of its awful secret.

He realised everything, sold the property for what it would fetch, and started for Europe as soon as it was possible for him to get away. And in the peace and quiet of an English home he does his best to forget the burning memory of those few days in the *hacienda*, and of the horrible, terrible secret of the Señorita's Ghost.

TRANSPLANTED.

"Fair, fragrant flower, from woodland mazes torn,
Keeping sweet watch on haunted, holy ground,
Art thou not pining, broken and forlorn,
Within the crowded city's gloomy bound?

"The bee falls faint whose kisses wooed thy leaves,
The laughing breezes die that fanned thy feet;
The sunny glade that nursed thy beauty grieves;
They call to thee, 'Why hast thou left us, sweet?'"

A perfumed whisper, floating softly through
The city, murmurs back to woodlands gay:
"Where tears of pity fall, there falls the dew;
And honest toil sheds light on darkest day."

C. E. Meetkerke.

IN THE LOTUS-LAND.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Letters from Majorca," "The Bretons at Home," etc., etc.

Donkey-Boy, Cairo.

IF, on first entering Cairo, we had been struck with its modern appearance, we soon found that there were two sides to the shield; *le revers de la médaille;* things new and old.

Modern Cairo, with its hotels, houses, and semi-palaces, surrounded by gardens in which Egyptian and European flowers mingle their perfume side by side, and the Western acacia and the Eastern palm grow together in friendly rivalry: all this is the outcome of necessity. Cairo has had to move with the times, like other places and people who do not wish to be left behind in the race. But we soon found that many traces of ancient Cairo still remain; many a picture of Oriental life, crowded with interest, offering constant variety to the visitor, whose attention is never for a moment allowed to flag.

That Cairo should possess so much that is modern is to be regretted, but necessity has no law. The city, surrounded by its walls and innumerable gateways, had, like the river, to overflow its boundaries. Part of the walls, many of the gateways, are still there; and when the visitor turns his face towards the citadel, and passes into the more ancient quarters of the town, he may forget the modern element that lies behind him.

But grandeur and magnificence must not be expected. The streets

are narrow, the houses often small; for in bygone days splendour and luxury were the exception, not the rule of life.

On the other hand, in quieter streets not given up to trade and traffic, there are, enclosed in unpretending gateways and behind dead walls, immense mansions where the rooms are some of them halls of vast height, fitted up with an Eastern gorgeousness dazzling to the eye, appealing to the senses. Here the master of the house does you honour. You recline upon soft divans, whilst an Arab servant, in picturesque costume, hands you coffee in small egg-like cups reposing in gold and silver filigree holders. And if, as once happened to ourselves, the host speaks no language but Arabic, the dragoman has to be brought in as interpreter.

Cairo seems to furnish every variety of Eastern life. As we have said, the numbers of costumes, the different types of face, appear endless and bewildering, until they have been classified and learned by heart. This adds immeasurably to the interest of the place. Everything then has its meaning and interpretation; you no longer walk through streets full of riddles, mystery, and the unknown.

And yet we must not forget that Cairo, with all its age, is young in comparison with most Eastern cities. There are two distinct Cairos, separated from each other by more than two miles of roadway lying beyond the suburbs of the more modern city. Old Cairo reposes on the banks of the Nile, near the picturesque island of Roda and its venerable Nilometer.

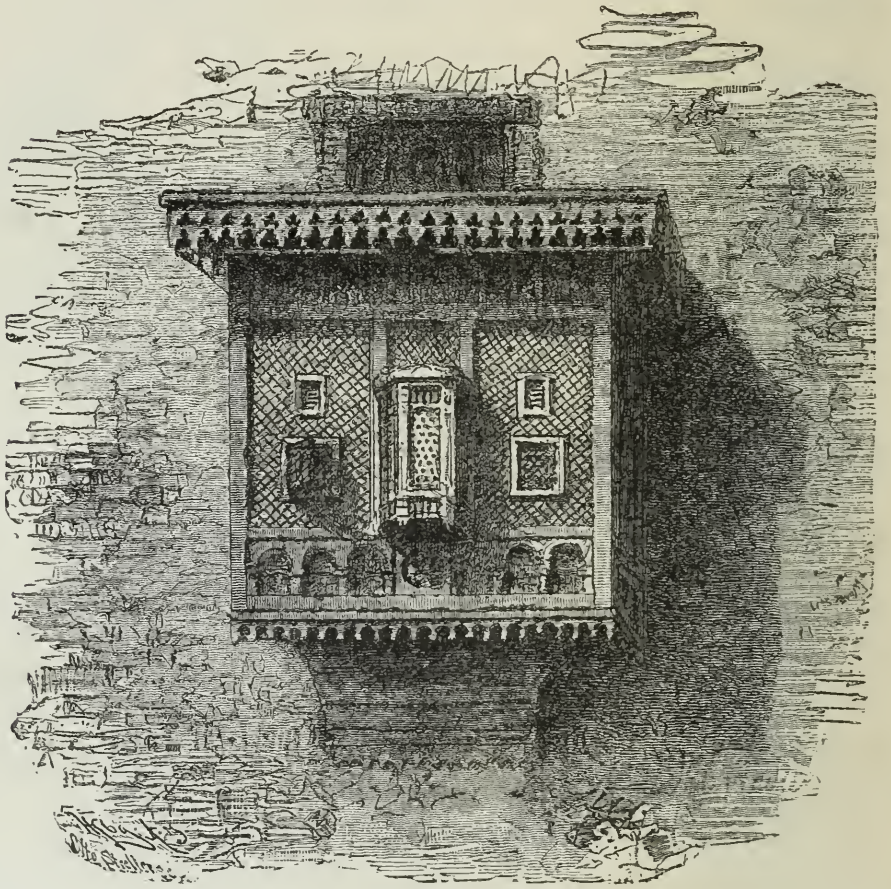
Let us turn for a moment to the more modern Cairo.

It is the largest and by far the most interesting city in Africa; and lying in a plain between the Nile and the Mokattam Hills, its site is well chosen. Nowhere else do we find so perfect a picture of Eastern life, or realize so thoroughly the familiar scenes of the Arabian Nights. What we once looked upon as fairy-tales and tales of magic, we now behold as almost facts and realities. The very people in the classic tales, the words they uttered, the incidents that fell to them—all this seems to have come to pass. It is gazing upon life from the dead.

We turn and look for Aladdin and his famous lamp, and see lamps in abundance, any one of which might be the very one that worked the wonders. The shops and bazaars are full of ornaments which flash and glitter on all sides, and reflect surrounding scenes a thousand and a thousand-fold. A myriad glass balls flashing in all directions might be the jewels that hung on the trees in the enchanted gardens. We see fifty forms of youths with interesting faces and soft sparkling eyes, clothed in the cool Eastern dress that is full of unstudied grace. Any one of them might be Aladdin himself searching for his lamp, after the wicked merchant had become possessed of it by his cunning. A hundred old, ugly and grey-headed old Arabians might be the crafty old merchant after he had once more lost the lamp and gone back to poverty and punishment.

Many of the narrow and irregular streets seem to have been built without forethought or design. Yet they are full of interest, with their deep tones, their traces of Moorish and Saracenic architecture, their multiplicity of light and projecting windows, made of that beautifully-carved and perforated fretwork called "Mushrabeeyeh."

This, the true Saracenic art, makes a fairyland of Cairo. Nothing is more interesting, nothing more characteristic than to stand at the end of a street and gaze upon its narrowing perspective. Far down, the houses seem to meet, the windows to kiss each other. Here and



Mushrabeeyeh Window of a Harem.

there, at an open lattice, an Eastern lady looks out upon her limited world. Her face is provokingly veiled; for the beauty of the large, liquid, dark eye, which is visible, seems to assure us that the whole countenance, uncovered, would be a charming vision. But the barbarous Eastern laws forbid this exposure, and so in the East one of the great privileges of life—the beauty and gentle influence of woman—is wanting.

Of what is she thinking, this veiled lady at the half-open lattice? Is she wondering how it fares with her sisters in colder climes? Does she know of the liberty they possess? That, instead of going about

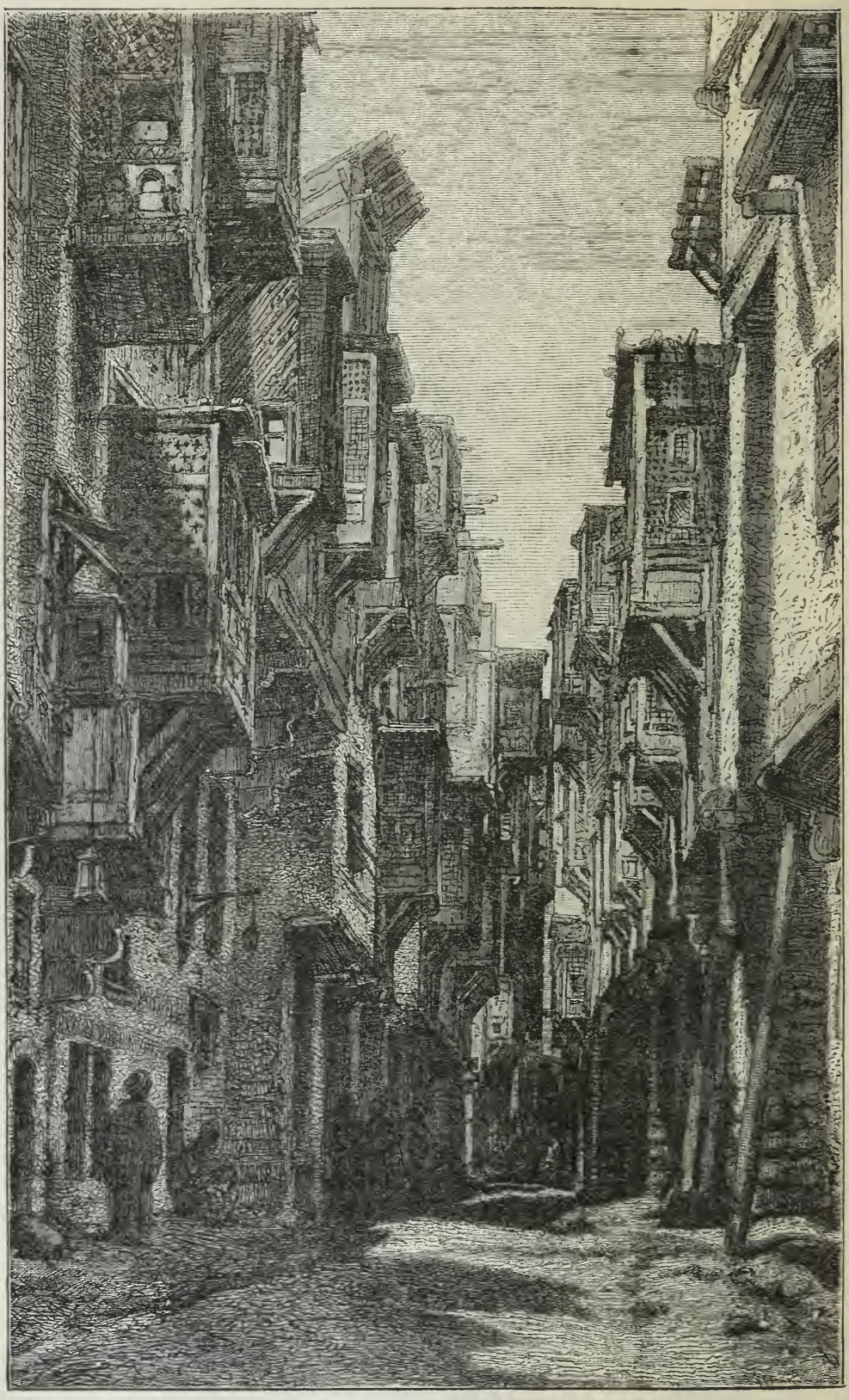
with veiled faces, or being shut up in harems, they are the equals of their lords, have all honour done unto them as unto the weaker vessel? Does she long for the same liberty and privileges? Would she be free to come and go according to fancy—to throw aside for ever these shackles of form and face, these destroyers of grace and movement—to boldly scour the desert, see distant shores, breathe the free air of foreign lands?

How is it with these women of Egypt? Do they rebel against their condition, which must rob life of all its sweetness and grace, and make it a penance rather than what it was intended to be—a source of delight, of praise and thanksgiving for life and breath and all things good and pure and beautiful? We never saw a veiled face at a window, or a woman walking the streets with all this Eastern disguise and encumbrance, but we longed to ask her a multitude of questions—discover whether she was happy and contented, looked upon herself as a part of heaven's divine creation, reserved for contentment in this world, happiness in the next: or thought of herself as a mere animated machine, in which ideas and impulse and aspiration must be stifled, and life can be only tolerated.

No doubt they have their compensations. There is sympathy in numbers; the Eastern woman sees that all her sisters are treated alike; she is neither better nor worse off than they. The back is generally fitted to the burden, and habit becomes second nature. So the daily round goes on. The days and the years pass; and for twelve centuries the women of Egypt have borne their captivity.

If the street with its narrowing perspective, down which you are gazing, is a quiet one, probably one or two Eastern figures will stand out characteristically: a woman on foot, covered with the habara or black mantle and hood, looking as if she were on her way to some house of mourning, or to join in some funeral procession; though blue, and not black, is the sorrowing garb in Egypt. Or a man mounted on a donkey is wayfaring at a dignified and leisurely pace—the men's dress is as imposing and graceful as the women's is the opposite—though the bright, sure-footed little donkeys can trot briskly enough, and will go on for hours with untiring energy.

The soft-eyed houri, from behind her mushrabeeyeh window, looks after the retreating Arab, whose silken garment declares him to be of her own rank in life, whilst his green turban announces a descendant of the Prophet; and she gives a sigh to her own incarceration, and like all daughters of Eve—and sons of Adam, for that matter—longs for the forbidden. It is impossible but that she draws a comparison between the inequalities of the sexes; but here there must be no rising in rebellion. They have to accept life as they find it, and there can be no thought of change. It would be well if those ladies of England who agitate for "women's rights"—which is only another term for men's rights—could be transported for a time



STREET IN CAIRO.

to the East and take the place of their subdued sisters. They would return with improved views of their own happier lot.

We pass up the quiet street, and turn into a wider thoroughfare just in time to see a dashing equipage, with its Sâis or runners carrying wands, keeping well in front of the horses, and shouting their warnings for all foot passengers, donkeys, and humbler vehicles to make way. Fast as the horses gallop, the strong, fleet young Sâis, trained to the work, are always ahead. They are lightly clothed, generally barefooted, and their free and well-formed limbs are fleet as the deer.

But Oriental life is best seen in the older part of the town. In the new suburbs, where the thoroughfares are wide and wholesome, and you breathe pure air, few ever venture except from necessity. Even the public gardens are seldom visited by the populace of Cairo. They keep to their close and crowded quarters, in which they seem to delight, asking for nothing better. The beautiful in nature, the form and colour and perfume of flowers, the trees raising their graceful heads and casting long shadows across the chequered pathways, or bending to the evening breeze, the song and flight of the birds—all these they look upon as unfamiliar objects, outside their lives, with which they are not in harmony. Nothing surprised us more than the comparative neglect of these public gardens, where we sometimes wandered in solitude.

The more ancient streets are bewildering in their crowd and noise; and often, as we trotted through them on donkeys, we seemed confronted by an animated wall, beyond which there could be no passing.

Then our dragoman with his powers of persuasion, mental and physical, would take the lead, and it was wonderful how he cleared a passage. Many a hard word was sent after him, as without ceremony he rode roughshod over a slow-moving Arab. To remonstrance he was supremely indifferent; or perhaps a well applied cut from his whip was all the notice he condescended to give. As a rule, you might shout yourself hoarse to these pedestrians, and they paid no more attention to the warning than if they had been deaf as adders. Only when the whip came down upon their shoulders, or the ass, roughly urged forward, overturned their balance, would they move out of the way in self-defence.

It was certainly very often exasperating, and we hardly wondered at Aleck's resorting to strong measures. So crowded were the streets, that a donkey passing quickly up would often cause quite a surging amongst the people. All the dragomans were not like ours in this respect; they were sons of peace and submission; kept well within all rules; never attempted any self-assertion; and no doubt lost many an opportunity to those they piloted. Yet Aleck's method, with any one else, might have been a failure. We often feared a dispute —at the very first sign of which we should have given him up.

CAIRO.

But his daring, coolness, commanding attitude, "as if to the manner born," carried him through everything.

"I learned to obey in the English army, sir," he was fond of saying; "now I make these wretched Egyptians obey me. They are a miserable set, always wanting backsheesh, never satisfied. I give them as little as I can."

And to do Aleck justice, he made a small coin go a very long way. Most of the other dragomans distributed backsheesh with a largesse worthy of a royal hand. At the end of the day, their own day's pay was a ridiculously small item in comparison with the fees lavishly bestowed right and left.

But if the streets are narrow, the byways are often so much more so, that two donkeys meeting will pause and stare, and wonder which must politely back into a friendly doorway. The mushrabeeyeh windows are so close to each other that it is often easy to pass from house to house without troubling the front doors.

The main streets resound with cries; movement and colour dazzle the eye; all the tints of the rainbow seem to have suddenly become detached and animated. Wherever you look there is a flashing of life and motion. Many-coloured turbans resemble a garden in which the flowers are performing a Dervish dance. The dark blue dresses of the Copts stand out in contrast with the yellow of the Jews. Not less distinctive are the different types of feature.

Here and there amongst them a woman is making her way, dressed in dark blue or black, silver or copper ornaments gleaming upon her wrists and ankles; the face, as ever, carefully veiled. Her hands, if visible, are generally stained with henna, a brownish yellow tint, looked upon as a great beauty. Many of the humbler women are tattooed, but in the streets all this is hidden by their disguise. They walk as if they had an object in life; and this is more than can be said of the men, who go about their work as if for them the sun never set, and life was nothing but a pastime. The women of the upper classes are graceful and well-made, but from their out-door costume this would never be suspected.

As we make way, the crowd does not diminish. There are cries on all sides. Many a merchant is standing at his shop door surveying the scene. As we have said, it is the Arabian Nights over again. Everything is full of interest and magic. At many a street corner, sitting on a stool, with a tray on a stand before him, a money-changer may be seen. He looks sharp and wide-awake, as if searching for prey. His eyes glitter like a falcon's; his long fingers have taken a chronic clutching attitude from the habit of gathering up gold and silver and handling paper money. All is fish that comes to his net, and he will take heavy toll in the way of exchange unless you are well up in the coin of the country. He generally speaks sufficient English to bewilder you, so that for the moment you almost forget that two and two make four.

Open to the streets, we notice here and there, as we pass through the crowd, the schools in which the young Arabs are given their limited education.

The schoolmaster is called a *fikeh*, and pursues the ordinary system with his pupils; whilst they, mischievously inclined, give him as much trouble as possible. His voice is often raised in anger, and now and then his hand administers a well-applied reproof. Human nature is the same everywhere in its broad outlines: and Solomon's advice seems to hold good in all countries. You may watch the proceedings for a few minutes; but if, at last, you attract the fikeh's attention, he will manifest displeasure, even threaten to treat you with as little ceremony as one of his own boys. His hand looks formidable, and discretion being the better part of valour, you move on.

These schools are never large, but they are numerous. Why they are so public it is difficult to say. The boys' attention often distracted makes order more difficult to keep.

The process of education is amusing to watch. Their chief task is learning the Koran, and as the boys recite verse after verse, they sway their body to and fro, as if, by and by, they meant to qualify for dervishes. Many of the little faces have bright black eyes brimming over with fun, and intelligent expressions.

A school is also attached to most of the public fountains. The teaching is chiefly religious. As we have said, the great end and aim is for the boys to learn the Koran by heart, so that later on they may be able to repeat it over and over again. The mere repetition is considered meritorious, and forms an act of devotion. Like the Roman Catholics, the Mohammedans have their rosary; a chaplet provided with ninety beads, for the ninety prayers containing, each prayer, one of the ninety-nine names of Allah. That the boys are able to learn so much by heart speaks well for their memory; for a great deal of the Koran is obscure and unintelligible, and nothing is explained to them—probably because the schoolmasters understand very little more about the matter than themselves.

Many of the sheykhs and patriarchs are of the highest order of intelligence, but the ordinary instructors are often less gifted. When a boy has learned the whole of the Koran, his education is supposed to be finished. A great family gathering then takes place, at which the schoolmaster is chief guest. He has often gained the honour after much labour and anguish of spirit, and nervous wear and tear, and forcible persuasion. We have seen that there is no royal road to learning.

These public fountains are reservoirs, filled with Nile water brought up on the backs of camels. They are numerous, and supply the people gratuitously with water. Generally they are handsome erections, ornamented with columns and surrounded with iron railings. The fountain consists of two storeys, and in the upper storey is held the school, where the children are taught a little reading, writing, and arithmetic, in addition to the Koran.

Fountains and schools are the result of endowment by pious people in days gone by.

In many a doorway may be seen the curious, somewhat patient and resigned face of the seller of date-bread, a preparation not very tempting to look at. He too sits on a low stool, with a great round

WATER-SELLER.

brazier before him supporting a large round tray, where the curious stuff is baking. Half his time is spent in using a willow whisk to keep the flies from attacking his store and diminishing his profits. Luckily, there is a great demand for his date-bread. Not only are grown-up men and women his customers, but the donkey and other

street boys go in for it; just as our street boys in England patronize the apple and pear barrows, and those delectable street ices which to them seem more delicious than nectar and ambrosia.

Many of these people ply their trades in the open air, and having no rent to pay, manage to exist upon what would be starvation to an Englishman in the same rank of life. So little is needed in this climate to keep body and soul together.

Conspicuous in the crowd are the water-carriers. These perhaps work harder than any others for a livelihood and are the worst paid. This seller of water looks a curious figure, as he wearily perambulates the streets with his heavy load; a strange-looking, inflated goatskin, slung across his back. He often also carries a porous bottle, called a kulleh, in his hand, with which he offers a draught to the passer-by.

For two-thirds of the year he has to fetch the water from the distant banks of the Nile; but during the months of overflow he can draw it from the canal which runs through the city. In return for the draught some give him the smallest possible coin, whilst others give him only their blessing. There are sellers of other refreshing drinks, such as sherbet, and a sweet decoction prepared from dates and other fruits.

Others, again, sell the various sweetmeats peculiar to the East, of which starch is generally the foundation. These they will exchange for old clothes, or anything else capable of being turned into money.

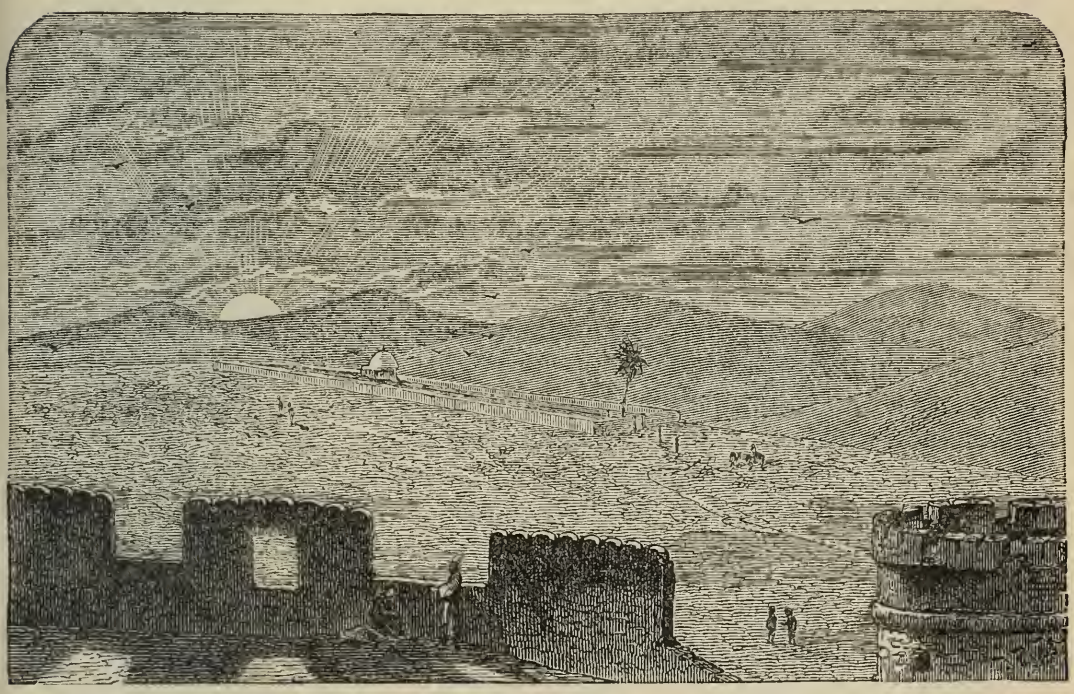
Few of the poor cook at home, buying their food ready prepared from these wandering merchants: unsavoury-looking jellies, fish and meat pies or puddings, and so forth, of which the aroma alone ought to satisfy an ordinary appetite. Their purchase made, they squat down cross-legged in the street, or a friendly doorway, and devour their food with great relish. There is no ceremony here, no lingering in conversation or exchanging of courtesies. It it said that thirty thousand of these cooks walk the streets of Cairo, or preside at stalls, thus providing for the wants of the ordinary population. They visit all the highways and byways, the courts and alleys, and mingle their cries with the cries of the water-sellers and a hundred other sellers, until the air seems as full of sound as it is of colouring.

Fruit and vegetables, the sweet but unpleasant sugar-cane, prepared maize, form no small part of the seller's stock in trade. The fruit stalls are certainly the least objectionable and the most tempting. Lupins grow in great abundance and are very popular. They are called "children of the river," because they have to be soaked in Nile water for some time before they are ready for use. Nearly all fruits and vegetables are found in their season. Of dates there are said to be twenty-seven kinds. Brandy is made from them; and in the oases of the desert a certain wine is sometimes made from the heart of the palm, which grows in the crown of the tree: expensive and cruel luxury, for the tree, robbed of its heart, dies; the

opposite to man, whose heart, the poets tell us, "may break, but brokenly live on."

The date palm blossoms in March and April, the fruit ripens in August and September. The vines also blossom in March and April, the fruit being ready for use in June and July. Women often preside at the stalls, but of course veiled.

All these itinerant merchants help to fill the streets with a noisy, restless, animated crowd. The camel-drivers are much in evidence. You suddenly look up from something that has been attracting your attention, and close to your face are startled to see a curious, patient, passive animal quietly making its way as if blind and deaf to surrounding scenes. There is a sad look in its eyes, as



GRAVE OF EVE: JEDDAH.

if it were for ever protesting against Nature for having given it a hump. Apparently of all creatures it is the least inquisitive. It is the most useful of Eastern animals, the least exacting. The camel will go for three days without water; and a little maize, or desert grass, or prickly acacia leaves will supply all its needs in the way of food.

Many of those amongst the crowd are strangers or men of business who have come to Cairo with some definite object in view; and this accomplished, they depart again.

Caravanserais, those great travelling institutions of the East, are for ever arriving from all parts of Africa and Arabia. They have patiently plodded across the desert, their faithful camels bearing heavy loads without a protest. Daily before sunset the whole company has offered up its prayers, adding to the usual formula a

petition for a safe arrival. Night after night, the tents have been pitched under the clear Eastern skies, the stars shining down upon them with a serene benediction. Perhaps they have come from distant Jeddah, on the borders of the Red Sea, having made before starting a pilgrimage to Eve's Tomb outside the walls of the flourishing town, where Eve is supposed to have been buried. A domed chapel is built over the tomb, which can only be seen through a hole in the pavement. Of Adam's tomb no mention is made; according to Eastern tradition our first parents do not repose together.

This Caravanserai, coming from Jeddah, is probably laden with the riches of the Turkish Empire. The camels bear precious burdens, and are well guarded by day, carefully watched by night. Pearls they carry in large numbers, and black coral, coffee of the choicest kind, balsam and senna leaves for the druggist, horses and donkeys. To this they probably add carpets, woollen and silk stuffs, spices, cocoa-nuts and essential oils. Jeddah trades in all these articles, for it has large dealings with Mozambique, Persia, India, the Malay Islands, and the interior of Arabia. They import corn, rice, butter, and oil: possess also a slave market, an institution no longer existing in Cairo. All these riches make the bazaars and khans of Jeddah some of the most important and most interesting of the East.

It is in these same bazaars that one expects most particularly to fall into the atmosphere of the Arabian Nights.

Here one looks for Haroun Alraschid and Abou Hassan, for Aladdin with his wonderful lamp, and the old Jew pedlar with his brand-new articles for temptation and exchange. If we do not find them, we find others exactly like them. The same people, the same stories and events might still be in existence; the same delightful life passed in a magic dream, a rainbow atmosphere, roses more numerous and beautiful than those of the Vale of Cashmere.

Passing under the great archway leading into the bazaars, we find ourselves surrounded by a curious crowd.

First comes the proud Bedouin, holding his head erect and walking as if the world belonged to him—as it does in the sense of roving and freedom; for the wide wilderness is his, and north, south, east, or west, he may pitch his tent as he likes. He is the true Bohemian, the child of the desert; the sandy waste is his cradle, the dark skies of heaven are his covering. Near him we note the sad-looking Copt, upon whose face there is still the inherited traces of past slavery and persecution; days when, centuries ago, oppression had to be borne without the hope of revenge, with no chance of a deliverer. No Moses arose for them, as for the children of Israel.

Next comes the Jew, with his impenetrable countenance, firmness of purpose, strength of will; the expression of the eye betraying a greed of gain; his chief object in life the heaping up riches, though he cannot tell who shall gather them.

Talking to him energetically, stands a Greek, who takes care that

he shall not be passed over. He is lithe of limb, bright and active, with clearly-cut features and eyes that never seem to slumber. The slow, deliberate movements of the true Oriental are out of touch with him. If he only had the fervency of the Mohammedan, the large brain and strength of purpose of the Jew, he might be first and foremost in the race. But he is rather of the butterfly species ; a rolling stone that gathers little moss.

All tribes, including every type of negro, are here ; all colours and complexions. Having grown familiar with their traits and costumes, we know them all ; each as distinct and evident as if ticketed with his place and nation. We have said how wonderfully it adds to the interest of the scene, and to its comprehension. You feel almost at home with them ; know almost as much about them as they know of themselves ; and of their pedigree and ancient history probably a little more.

The bazaars are undoubtedly interesting as an Oriental institution ; but they are as certainly disappointing at a first glance. We enter them full of the influence of the *Arabian Nights:* pages read and re-read, until at last everything is seen through their medium. Imagination has conjured up something very like Fairyland ; we expect we know not what. Unformed visions of gorgeous magnificence, of Eastern charm and beauty, are floating through the mind : but reality falls very far short of this fanciful picture.

Cairo possesses two chief bazaars and a great number of small ones. Some of them date as far back as the thirteenth century, and the Khân-Khalîl stands on the site once consecrated to the tombs of the Caliphs—those Arab sovereigns of Egypt who reigned before the days of the Mamelukes. What they were in those days none can tell.

In these, our exalted visions fall to the ground as we observe that they are little more than long streets or rows of very ordinary stalls—thoroughfares so narrow that they soon become crowded ; whilst overhead many a tarpaulin keeps out the sun, and a semi-obscurity often reigns. The thoroughfares are uneven and badly-paved—like many of the streets of Cairo. On each side the goods are displayed on stalls or in booths, each presided over by a dark-eyed Oriental. He has a great eye to a bargain, and asks an Englishman just twice the amount he is generally willing to take. If he thinks he has secured a good customer, he will produce coffee, served in small delicate cups very much like an egg-shell cut in two, reposing in gold or silver filigree stands, or stands of fine brass-work. The cups hold very little, but the coffee is strong and excellent. It is made in true Oriental fashion, and the grounds are stirred up and taken with it, a creamy frothy beverage, without milk and often without sugar. The coffee is less finely ground than with us, and forms a less unpleasant sediment.

Behind the front stall is generally a large square room filled with

goods, where the merchant will open out before you the treasures of the East, according to his line. Rich brocades, embroideries cunningly and wonderfully worked, silks and muslins; every species of fine damask and gold and silver cloth; ancient trappings of gold and crimson sheen, wrought handwork, with long gold and crimson tassels that must once have graced a royal *cortége* with wonderful effect. Many of these articles are not Arabian or Egyptian, but Persian and Indian. And some are new, and some are centuries old.

ENTRANCE TO BATH FOR WOMEN: CAIRO.

Perhaps the next stall to these rich cloths and brocades is one of precious stones. Small piles of the red ruby, the blue amethyst, the white and yellow diamond, the pink topaz, send forth a thousand flashing rainbow hues as a sunbeam pierces a cunning hole in the tarpaulin and falls upon the table. But beware how you purchase the stones, or you may regret your bargain.

Stalls of gold and silver work are frequent. The Egyptian and Arabian women as much as their Western sisters love ornaments of

every kind and load themselves with them; from the glittering spangles that decorate the *rabtah*, or front part of the head-dress, to the anklets worn just above the foot: thus armed *cap-à-pied* with so-called charms. Some are more conspicuous than ornamental, such as the ring the women of certain tribes wear through the nose, luckily few and far between. One of the bazaars is given up entirely to this work. In every booth you may see a cross-legged merchant working at his beautiful art. It is generally sold by weight, and a small profit will content him for his time and labour.

Another small bazaar is given up to the shoemakers, and the visit is neither romantic nor interesting. The manufacture of slippers is an important item in their commerce. They are constantly used by every one. At every mosque-door are many pairs: and they soon wear out.

In the most fragrant of the bazaars the spices are sold: those beautiful and pungent Arabian spices, which scent the air with delicious and subtle perfume. You have only to close your eyes, to fancy yourself wandering in groves of cinnamon or under the shady branches of the scented cedar. In the next bazaar you pause before a stall where the rich attar of roses brings to your imagination all the charms of that Bower of roses that stood by Bendemeer's stream, where, we are told, the nightingale sang all the day long. Here the nightingale is silent, but the scent of the roses is never absent. The well-known empty bottles are lying in numbers before you. If you buy one, the merchant takes it up, weighs it, then fills it with the luscious perfume, which filters in drop by drop. It is sold strictly by measure, and is worth almost its weight in gold.

Perhaps the most interesting of all the stalls and shops in or out of the bazaars, are those filled with the mushrabeeyeh work of the country; with Oriental lanterns fitted with rich ruby glass, which casts a brilliant though subdued reflection when lighted; with daggers, old and modern, enclosed in magnificent silver sheaths. From the number of ancient daggers sold year after year, the world at one time must have been generally occupied in making them. Many have a romantic history attached to them, as ingeniously put together as anything to be found in the *Arabian Nights*—and as apocryphal.

In these shops you find yourself in the true Oriental atmosphere. In some, such as that kept by Purvis, near the entrance to the Mooskee, you may wander from room to room, amazed and enchanted. Here again is fairyland. All the manufactured wonders of the East are before you, of the best and most costly description.

Especially we remember a mother-of-pearl coffer, more beautiful than anything we had ever seen of its kind; full of subtle rainbow colours that changed and glowed like the hidden fires of an opal; of a refined and exquisite tone that nothing but extreme age could have given. No price would tempt the owner to part with it at that time. It was centuries old, and not to be replaced, he declared. Opening

it, he displayed rich and antique brocades, cunningly wrought in days gone by—treasures worthy of the shrine. When we first saw it,

EMBROIDERERS: BAZAARS OF CAIRO.

we stood in wondering admiration. This, we said, must have once belonged to Aladdin's palace, and was made by magicians; no ordinary human fingers could have wrought it.

"Nay," returned Purvis, "he could not admit that. For if it had been made by magic, by magic it might one day disappear. These," he continued, spreading out his gold and silver brocades, his ancient silken embroideries, "you may have; but the coffer is one of my treasures. I bought it years ago, and should hardly know my place without it. The time will come, no doubt, when I shall be willing to let it go: the time comes for everything," he added, philosophically. "I will promise you the refusal of it, if you like."

He had a rule that his fellow-merchants would do well to imitate: not a fraction from the price first asked would he abate. If others in Cairo did the same, they would find it very much to their advantage in the end.

We had been spending an immense time one morning in this enchanted palace, when our dragoman, probably tired of waiting, appeared on the scene and awoke us from the dream in which we were lost. Had we taken coffee, we should have said it had worked some charm upon us; but we had taken nothing. In an exquisite filigree incense-burner Purvis had certainly lighted a pastille which sent forth an aroma deliciously intoxicating, steeping mind and fancy in a golden atmosphere; but it was atmosphere and imagination only. We were in an enchanted palace, and wanted no return to real life. Aleck, however, thought differently. We must be buying up half the shop at fabulous prices; it was time he interfered. In reality we had bought nothing. We had been feasting upon wonders. The desire for possession had not yet reached us. But for Aleck to think was to act; indecision formed no part of his character. It was never more apparent than when he confided to us his matrimonial troubles.

"Are you married, Aleck?" we had asked him one morning. His countenance clouded over.

"Indeed I am, sir," he replied; "two wives."

"Isn't that one too many?" we asked. "In England we are allowed only one wife, and even one is sometimes hard to manage. I don't know what the consequences of two would be."

"Every country makes its own laws," returned Aleck, pompously, as if quoting a proverb. "In England you may only have one wife; here we may have four. If I had four I should sacrifice myself to the Nile; they might fight it out together. I can manage pretty well everything in the world, but the Prophet himself could not manage women: that is well known: and so when one got too much for him, he simply divorced her. They are more stubborn than camels fiercer than eagles, louder than jackals, uncertain as the wind. When I go home, if I am pleasant with one, the other would scratch my eyes out; it is nothing but noise, quarrelling and contention. On the other hand, if I scold one, both make common cause against me, and you would think that I was a perfect demon. But," he added, a fixed determination coming into his face, "I will stand it no

A Sarrâf, or Money-Changer.

longer. I was thinking about it this morning, and made up my mind. As soon as I go back home this time, I shall divorce one of them and send her back to her mother. We can do that, you know, sir; it is a capital law, and works well. Most of them are kept in a good temper by it. It is only the shrews, with tempers stronger than they are, who throw prudence to the wind."

"What made you marry her?" we asked; wondering what sort of wooing and winning these people were allowed. Many a bride groom never sees his wife until after the marriage ceremony is over. A rude awakening must often be the result—followed by a speedy divorce. In Aleck's rank, however, they are less restricted, and meet more freely.

"She was pretty," replied our dragoman ruefully, "and she took care to keep her temper out of sight. We had often met, and she seemed very fond of me. So one day when the stars were against me, I married her. Ever since then she has led me a life."

All this was delivered so rapidly that many a sentence had to be guessed at or interpreted by the context. But the look of determination was not to be mistaken. Aleck had made up his mind, and the wife's fate was doomed. It was his short and satisfactory way of taming the shrew. Even Achilles had his vulnerable point, and here was our dragoman's. He could manage the people about him, gain his end where others failed—he could not rule his women-folk.

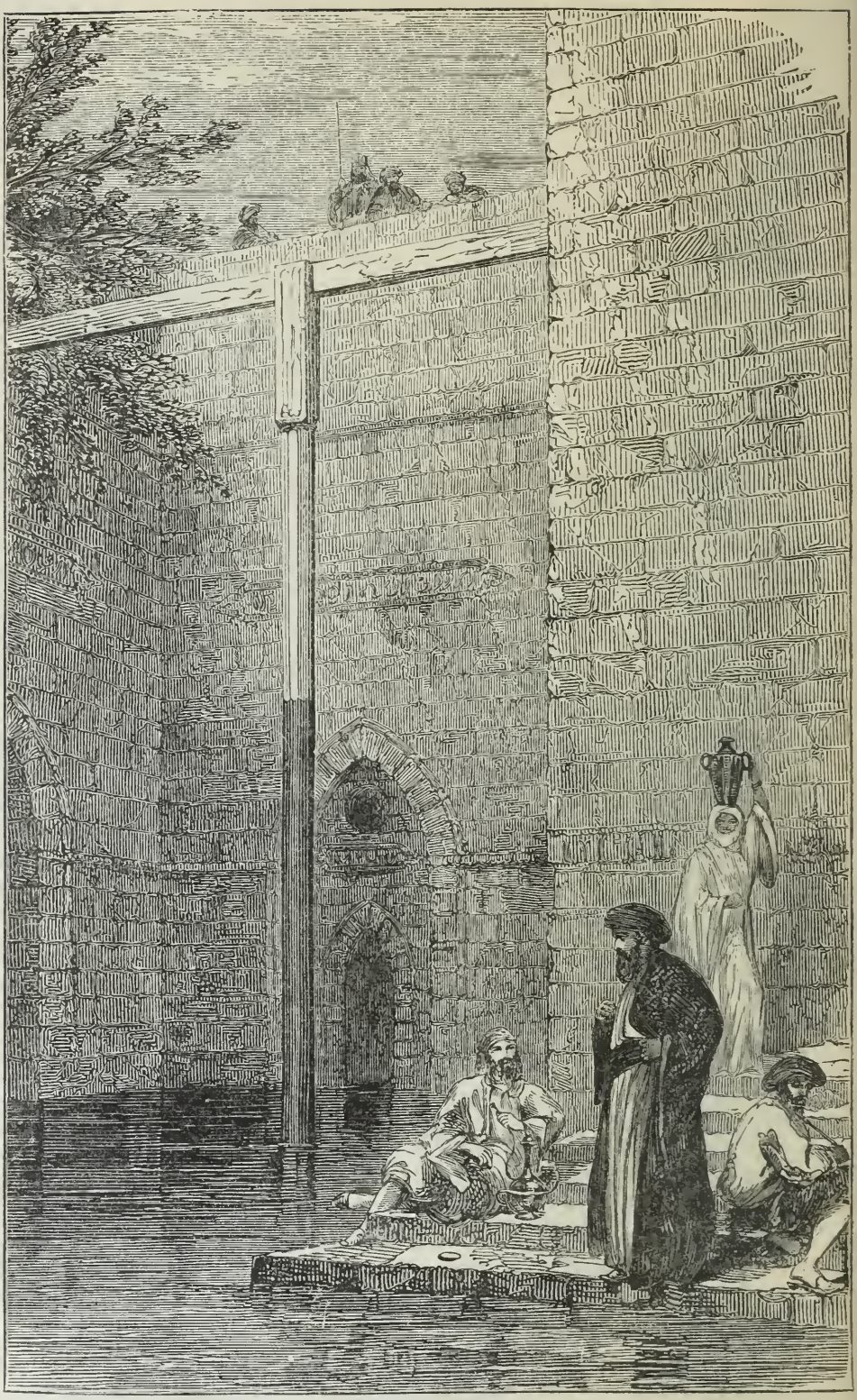
But this is a digression from Purvis's, where the sudden appearance of our dragoman awoke us from our Eastern glamour.

Aleck looked disturbed. It is true we were his masters for the time being, but that only meant that he was to have the privilege of doing as he liked, and of giving us suggestions which, like royal commands, were not open to refusal.

For some time he had amused himself outside Purvis's; wandering about the small market, visiting the fruit stalls and helping himself here and there to a particularly fine specimen with a condescension which made the act a favour to the stall-holder; gossiping with his numerous friends, who were as plentiful as dates in autumn; bestowing a cut of his whip upon a luckless beggar in return for the blessing which accompanied the demand for charity—a response which generally checked the blessing half way, and turned it into something very different.

All this was very well for a time; but at last, when all the stalls had been visited, all the people interviewed, and all the news exchanged, it occurred to Aleck that he was being neglected. This was an unpardonable sin in his eyes.

We had taken donkeys that morning for a very different purpose than to keep them waiting outside Purvis's: no less a purpose than a ride into the desert to hunt for fossils, visit the petrified forest and watch the shadows lengthening from the distant pyramids. The visit



NILOMETER: ISLAND OF RODA.

to Purvis's had been an impromptu affair, arising out of a remark from H. at the moment we were passing the archway leading through the small market to his place. On the impulse of the moment we had turned in, leaving Aleck, the donkeys, and the donkey-boys to amuse themselves outside. Not that Aleck would have scrupled to follow us, making the round of everything, and listening to all that was said; taking mental observations to crop up afterwards in the form of advice. He had remained outside this morning of his own free will, and for his own special pleasure. So when it pleased him, he did not hesitate to enter with his protest.

"Please, sir," said he, "the donkeys outside are eating their heads off. We have lost our morning. It is too late now to go to the desert."

And then he threw a reproachful look upon his surroundings, as if wondering whether we had bought up the whole collection, or had left a few bagatelles for others who should come after.

"Are the donkeys at the door, Aleck?"

"Yes, sir. Great day for the donkey boys. They say all pay and no work. Donkeys gone to sleep. Idle boys in mischief."

"What is to be done now?" we inquired, consulting a large clock just in front of the wonderful old mother-of-pearl coffer. Time had flown on wings in this enchanted palace. Purvis himself seemed to delight in taking us round—apparently indifferent whether purchases were made or not; satisfied if only his handicraft was admired—for all the exquisite mushrabeeyeh work, the magnificent cabinets and sideboards, chairs, tables, wonderful screens, and a hundred other objects, were made upon the premises, under his very eye. He had clever designers always about him, the most skilled workmen of Egypt.

"I don't know, sir," replied Aleck. "I think the best thing will be to give the donkeys a little exercise, and the boys too; a good sharp trot down to Roda Island and the Nilometer, right through Old Cairo. We could do it well, and be back by lunch-time."

So we thanked Mr. Purvis for his attention, promising a speedy return when there were no donkeys to be kept waiting, and no tyrant dragoman to be obeyed; and departed. We mounted our animals and away we went, Aleck triumphantly leading the van. You might have thought the whole of Cairo belonged to him.

Every one in Cairo mounts donkeys, and therefore no one looks conspicuous. On the first occasion, one feels uncomfortable and out of place. In front of you is, perhaps, a huge specimen of humanity, six foot four, plodding along on his patient animal, his feet almost touching the ground, his head half-way to the clouds. Beside him rides his ministering angel, more than making up in breadth what is wanting in height. Her flopping hat keeps rhythm to the donkey's step, beating time like a metronome. They look a ridiculous couple, and you wonder if you look equally absurd. But you have no flopping lady to escort, looking like an old-fashioned man-of-war

ISLAND OF RODA.

under full canvas; and Nature has not gifted you with sixty inches of waist measurement, or seventy-six of height. The uncomfortable feeling wears off; you soon find yourself at home on donkey-back; and when you grow used to the action, it is not unpleasant.

We went trotting down the streets of Cairo, Aleck scattering people right and left, indifferent to human life. Passing out of the town, Old Cairo lay in front of us: we were soon within its ancient, rather woe-begone, though interesting thoroughfares. On reaching the ancient Mosque of Amrou, our dragoman, having had enough of interiors for one day, pretended that it was closed. The old port was full of interest and animation, with its picturesque boats and busy crowd. Here the Nile opens up majestically, and you may trace its course for a great distance. Opposite we noted Gizeh with its Pyramids and small palm-woods of great beauty. Ferries, darting to and fro, conveyed passengers and animals from bank to bank; donkeys and camels in friendly contact with each other; the one small and light of foot and easy to manage; the other heavy, clumsy, evidently ill at ease upon the water, sacred Nile though that water was.

A ferry-boat quickly took us across to the island of Roda, which occupies the centre of the river in front of Old Cairo: an island still green and flourishing, though its best days are over. Here palm-trees yet grow and flowers are gorgeous and abundant. It was once famous for its beautiful gardens, but these have for the most part fallen into neglect. It now owes much to its natural fertility.

Roda is chiefly esteemed because it contains the Nilometer, which has stood there since the beginning of the ninth century. A winding and intricate sort of maze, conducted us after a time to a closed gate, at which Aleck knocked—for a time in vain. At last a woman appeared, and with slow and deliberate manner opened to us. Aleck of course remonstrated, and the woman replied that not she but the gardener was doorkeeper. The latter, however, had gone off to be married—or divorced; she couldn't remember which, and one was as bad as the other; for if the men got divorced is was only to marry other wives. She herself was still an unappropriated blessing, and her mind had probably revolted against the sex that would none of her charms. Her face was uncovered—perhaps the island made its own laws and sensibly gave its women their freedom—and certainly her beauty led one to suppose that she would remain unappropriated to the end.

The garden was charming and productive. Lovely fruit trees were evidently much more in favour with the absent gardener than the lady who was his *locum tenens*. Exquisite flowers enlivened the beds and sent forth a delicious perfume. Many a palm-tree threw its shadow across the white dazzling paths. Tradition says that here Moses was found by Pharaoh's daughter—it is probably only tradition—

and on the opposite bank of the river there is a tree bearing Moses' name.

Amidst all this wealth of Nature, stood the Nilometer. Here for more than a thousand years the rising of the Nile has been anxiously watched. Upon this depended the prosperity of the country: so much so that until it reached a certain height the people were free of taxes, as already stated. The measuring was in the hands of the Sheykhs, who for long years gave out false reports.

A square chamber contains the measuring-rod, and the Nile water reaches it by means of underground canals. Niches and Gothic arches resting upon columns ornament the walls. A wide stone staircase leads to the water, where men and women may fill their pitchers and flirt, gossip, or moralize, according to their mood. Numerous inscriptions are visible.

In the centre of the water rises the column or measuring rod that has been in use for centuries. It is octagonal, and once bore many inscriptions which have been worn or washed away. The measurement was kept under the control of the Sheykhs, and is so to this day; but these in their turn are now surveyed by the police. Then, as now, the tillers of the soil were not allowed to approach it. When the waters reach a certain mark, the good news is proclaimed; the banks are cut; the waters spread over the country. An image in the form of a woman, made of mud, gaudily decorated, is then with much ceremony thrown into the Nile as a propitiatory offering. In days gone by a living woman and not an image was sacrificed, but happily that is all over.

We gazed with strange interest upon this relic of the past, which means so much for the Egyptians. Year by year, century after century, this measurement has been watched with an anxiety which meant life or death, famine or abundance, to multitudes, telling inch by inch the rising or falling of the waters from their invisible source. The effect of the inundation begins to be felt about the month of June; this generally continues until September, when the waters commence to subside. The mud deposited dries up in January, and upon this depends the fertility of Egypt.

For the moment our surroundings were beautiful and romantic. With all its flowers and fruit trees, there was a certain air of wildness about the garden of the Nilometer. At a little distance, on rising ground, was the small palace to which the garden belonged. At our feet flowed the classic and venerable stream. A barge filled with hay was passing upwards, one of those Nile boats that with sail set are so full of beauty and charm, and outlined against the clear sky form so complete a picture. Not far off, a gorgeous and royal Dahabeeyah was moored near the palace of Ibrahim Pacha.

Before us, along the banks of the canal, stretched the houses of Old Cairo—grey, flat-roofed tenements, that had long been strangers to wealth and prosperity. We caught a glimpse of a street running

at right angles with the river. Many a refuse heap lay about, from which even the lynx-eyed old chiffoniers of Paris would have found it difficult to extract the smallest treasure. A woman from the top of a house was hauling up, by means of a basket and a long rope, a load of vegetables that she had just bought from one of the street merchants, whose name—as we have seen—is legion. Down the grey banks of the Nile women were passing with their water-pitchers; women of free and graceful bearing in spite of their poverty and humble birth. As they walked away with their artistically-shaped jars upon their head, they might have been descendants of some Eastern queen. A ferry-boat shot across the stream, making directly for the foot of our water temple. It was the truant gardener, and a veiled lady accompanied him. "Evidently marriage and not divorce was the reason of his absence," said H., when Aleck had duly informed us of the illustrious approach. "I thought a wedding was accompanied by all sorts of ceremonies and festivities."

"Not always, sir," returned our dragoman. "It depends on the rank of the people. With some, too, like the gardener here, it is an every day affair. He divorces a wife about once a year, and marries another. I know him well."

The boat stopped within a few yards of us, and the bridegroom helped the bride to disembark as if he had been another Antony, she another Cleopatra. Of her face we saw little, and her form was not sylph-like, but this might be due to a superabundance of clothing. They marched up the pathway together, the gardener stopping a moment to exchange greetings with Aleck. Then he went on and both disappeared within the house.

We took the boat back to the shore, sorry to leave the pleasant little island. But time and tide wait for no man. The donkeys had had another rest; a long trot was before us.

Once more we mounted, and Aleck led the van. Once more his voice made itself heard, his whip flourished right and left. Out of Old Cairo into the long dusty road, where we caught glimpses of lovely gardens, and barren stretches of land, and the windings of the river; modern Cairo, with its tombs and temples, rising in front of us like an oasis out of a desert. And ever above and before us, in the far distance, was the everlasting rock, crowned with its ancient citadel; whilst the Mosque of Mohammed Ali, with its slender minarets reaching towards the heavens, looked like a vision of Paradise, and might well be the end and aim of many an earthly pilgrimage.

THE GHOST OF ST. ELSPETH.

By George Fosbery.

I.

AMOS GUINGELL was the ne'er-do-weel of the Cornish village of St. Elspeth.

While the fishermen went out in the boats to earn their living, Amos would sit idly on the cliff and flick pebbles into the heaving water below. When the village folk flocked to the town on market-day, Amos was the only one who omitted to combine business with pleasure, and who invariably returned in a condition the reverse of sober. When his neighbours had gone to bed, and had fallen into their first sweet sleep, Amos would reel down the cobble-paved street with clattering footsteps, and with a coarse song upon his tongue. On Sunday, when all other respectable people had gone up the hill to the church on the cliff, Amos was generally gazing dreamily at the Red Rock Lighthouse out at sea, or prowling around in search of something to appropriate, or of an opportunity for damaging his neighbours' property. Amos never honestly earned anything; and consequently he was never in possession of any spare cash; except when, by means of persuasion and threats artfully intermingled, he prevailed upon his grandmother to give him a shilling or two.

Granny Guingell was quite a public functionary at St. Elspeth. Not only did she clean out the church and act as pew-opener, but whenever an increase of the population was expected, Granny Guingell's services were engaged. Woe betide every interested person if they were not! She had been present in her professional character and as presiding genius at the arrival of every human novelty in that community for well-nigh fifty years. Thus she came to be considered, or at any rate she came to consider herself, indispensable at every such ceremony; moreover, she let people know it.

At this very time she was anxiously looking forward to a call on business of this same profitable nature. Peter Robbins, the grocer, danced to and fro from his wife behind the shop to Granny Guingell behind her knitting, twenty times a day to announce, so far, that he had nothing to announce.

Thus Granny Guingell had managed to put by a tidy sum against the evil day, if it should ever overtake her. And this same tidy sum her grandson's idleness and extravagance tended ever to diminish.

He was now in search of her and of her money, being, for some reason or other, more than usually pressed for lack of that commodity.

"Wherever be her got to? drat her! Her has got a proper lot o' cash put away somewheres or another. I've a-looked up the chimley, I've a-looked in the bed, I've a-looked in the old chiney tea-pot, I've a-dived down into the cellar, and clomb up into the roof; I've looked up and down everywhere; and for certain sure the money bain't in the house. Wherever can it be?"

While indulging in these edifying reflections, he slouched round a corner and came suddenly upon the person of whom he was in search.

A small knot of gossips stood and listened to Granny Guingell, who was entertaining them by holding forth upon her pet subject.

"Oh, it's no laughing matter, I tell 'ee! I wouldn't go nigh that there church after dark—not if you'd give me five hund'r'd pounds!"

"Yes, sure enough! I've heard tell dreadful tales about the ghosteses as was seen there in my poor father's time."

"'Tis a wisht old place!" said another.

"What is this 'ere ghostie like?" inquired some one.

"Like!" exclaimed Granny. "Did ye never hear tell? Why! Now—first thing you see, is St. Elspeth a-kneeling on the old tomb on the chancel, and after that——"

"Go it, Granny!" interrupted Amos, who was taking an unusual interest in the old lady's utterances.

"And after that, there be a ter-r-ible rumbling among the bones—and chains a-rattling—and sich *screams*—aw, my dear!"

Granny's audience shuddered at her description of the terrors of the church after dark. But—such is the inquisitiveness of human nature—not one of the little crowd was content until a complete description had been given of the very worst horrors for which Granny could vouch.

While they were thus engaged in shattering one another's nervous systems, the street door of the house before which they were standing opened, and Dr. Perran, the local practitioner, stepped out.

Granny appealed to the doctor for confirmation of the report that the church was haunted.

"I have often heard the tradition," replied the doctor. "I do not, however, believe in the truth of it, and I have never met with any one who claimed that he had seen the ghost with his own eyes."

Whereat Granny Guingell grew vastly indignant, and asserted that on several occasions, when her duty of cleaning out the church had detained her after sunset, she had seen the apparition of the saint, and had been terrified by all the concomitant circumstances of groans, bones, chains, and screams, which she believed to issue from the graves and vaults beneath the building.

Amos unexpectedly confirmed all that she had said, and added a good many other particulars on his own account. The slabs forming the floor of the church would sometimes stand on end—so he said—and clattering skeletons would rise and pervade the church in a

ghostly dance. He had seen them through the keyhole of the door; and would not go near the place again after dusk for all the riches in England.

A burst of incredulous laughter, started by the doctor, followed the preposterous testimony of Amos. The group of gossips separated, and left Amos standing alone on the spot.

"Ghosts be hanged!" he muttered. "Granny is a deep 'un. I 'spect I knows now where she hides her money."

Dr. Perran paid a visit to a patient living at a distance of some miles from the village. Riding homewards, while darkness was setting in, he remembered the conversation which he had heard that afternoon on the subject of ghosts.

Every man on this earth has within him a courage which partakes of the nature of bravado. He is a strange mortal who does not at one time or another wilfully rush into a danger which he professes to despise, but through which, at the same time, he will feel proud to have passed. Dr. Perran did not believe in ghosts in general, still less in the ghost of St. Elspeth in particular. He resolved, however, to go out of his road, and to take the church on his way home; not because he hoped or expected to meet with any supernatural experiences, but because he felt, in a modest sort of way, that there would be a certain satisfaction in boasting that he had been there after dark and had seen nothing.

II.

Granny Guingell's indispensable services seemed likely to be required sooner than had been expected.

Towards the hour of sunset, Peter Robbins ran hurriedly and excitedly up the street and knocked at the old wife's door. There came no reply to the summons. It was evident that Granny had gone out. The little grocer retreated a step or two from the door and surveyed the windows of the house, as if he expected them to help him.

At this moment his eye discerned a fluttering slip of paper pinned to the door-post. Granny had a business-like side to her character, and the slip of paper had been specially placed where it was, to meet the contingency of her presence being required, a possibility which was now fulfilled. Peter Robbins read the intimation which the old lady had providently affixed there. It was expressed in the significant and masterly idiom, "Gone up!"

For an instant Peter's bewildered imagination wrestled with the thought of the old lady's unexpected and glorious translation, in chariots of fire, to regions celestial. But on further reflection he concluded that the good dame merely wished to convey the announcement that she might be found, up the hill, at the church.

There was no time to be lost! Dr. Perran was known to be at a distance. Granny must be fetched immediately.

But if there was one thing in the world, and indeed there were many to which Peter Robbins' courage was unequal, it was the danger of traversing a churchyard after dark. He remembered, too, that Granny Guingell had borne witness to the fact of the church being haunted. Nothing on earth would induce him to enter the building alone.

Peter gathered quickly about him a little troup of friends, consisting chiefly of the gossips who had listened open-mouthed, that morning, to the grim particulars about the ghost, given by the old dame and her grandson Amos.

The little party ascended the hill by a winding path, and, having arrived at the summit, turned their faces to the church which stood looming before them in the darkness.

But we must hark back. At or about the time, when Peter Robbins knocked at Granny Guingell's door, Dr. Perran, returning to St. Elspeth rather earlier than he expected, turned his horse's head up the sloping turf of the hill whereon stood the church. As he came nearer he perceived, to his surprise, that there shone a light of some kind in the sacred building.

He picked his way among the graves, avoiding the slabs and stones for fear his approach should be discovered. Having dismounted, and hung his horse's bridle to a nail on the wall, he stole up to St. Elspeth's window, a gothic light filled with ancient glass, having a border or margin of transparent panes. The design in stained glass, represented the figure of the Saint herself. The window was six or seven feet high, and stood only three feet from the ground.

Putting his eyes close to a part of the transparent margin of the window, Dr. Perran tried to see what was taking place in the chancel.

He perceived the figure of a man who carried a lantern. The individual, whose face he was unable to espy, advanced to an ancient tomb let into the wall on the opposite side of the chancel. There he stopped. Then, after a rapid glance about him to see if he was alone, the man laid down his lantern and began to examine the tomb. He was evidently dissatisfied about something, and was heard to utter an oath. Then, taking a small iron bar from his pocket, he began deliberately to break open the lid of the tomb.

At this moment the mist that had been hanging over the sea drifted away, and through the clear atmosphere shone a brilliant shaft of light from the Red Rock Lighthouse. The powerful rays struck through the stained glass window at which Dr. Perran was standing, and flashed in the eyes of his horse close by.

The steed snorted, shook his bit, reared, and broke his rein. The doctor clutched at one of the streaming bands, and barely arrested the career of the frightened beast, as it snorted again wildly, and

plunged about on the slabs and stones in the graveyard. Dr. Perran was dragged unwillingly past the porch at the further end of the church.

At the same time an elderly female figure rushed in terror from the porch. She was apparently frightened at the strange noises made by the horse and by its struggling master. She screamed as she ran down the path, and plunged into the midst of a terrified party of villagers, who little recognised in her rapidly retreating figure and terror-stricken accents, the form and voice of Granny Guingell. Horrified in turn, and adding their cries to the din, the scared villagers fled in any and every direction.

Dr. Perran's horse, having broken away from him, that gentleman returned to the church in order to find out, if possible, what had given rise to all this commotion. Being far too matter-of-fact to attribute any of these events to supernatural causes, he felt it his duty to go back and curtail the sacrilege in the church of which he had been an unexpected witness.

He entered the porch and tried the door, which opened easily. Indeed, the key was on the outside of the lock; but, for some reason or other, it had become firmly fixed, and would not turn in its place.

Pushing open the church door, Dr. Perran entered.

The lantern still stood upon the floor before the tomb. Although it shed little light around the chancel and the body of the church, the Doctor could discern one object which arrested his attention.

On the pavement within the altar-rails, and close to the lantern itself, lay the prostrate figure of a man.

On the wall close by, and described on the flat surface above the ancient tomb, was a perfect representation of St. Elspeth's window, cast there by the brilliant beams from the Red Rock Lighthouse.

Doctor Perran went up the church, and, by the aid of the lantern, recognised in the seemingly lifeless face of the man the features of—Amos Guingell!

The Doctor soon found that Amos was more frightened than hurt. Reassured by the voice of a friend in need, the youth rose and seized the Doctor's arm. He asked whether the latter had seen and heard the ghosts and their goings on.

Doctor Perran asked what Amos referred to, but the lad appeared to be too frightened to explain. The Doctor, therefore, took up the lantern and led him away.

On the road back to the village Amos gave an account of himself.

He had, as it appeared, got himself into debt, and was unable to procure money wherewith to get himself out again. He had asked Granny Guingell again and again for cash, but she always refused him. Knowing that she must be possessed of a considerable sum of money, he had watched her movements for some time with great persistency in the hope of discovering the hiding-place of her pile. It was not till this same day that he learnt what he wanted.

Having followed her up to the church, when she went to clean it out, he observed her in the act of removing a stone or slab from the ancient tomb in the chancel. From the space beneath the stone she took a large bag of coin, to which she added a further sum, and which she afterwards replaced, covering it with the stone in such an ingenious way that Amos tried in vain to find out the secret of displacing it.

It may here be mentioned that when Granny had replaced her stone, she intended to leave the church. She found, however, that the key of the door had stuck fast (owing, as she little thought, to a judicious application of mud and wadding by Amos). Being unwilling to leave the door of the holy edifice open, Granny had sat down on the bench within the porch to contemplate the situation and to devise means of making the lock act again. Very soon the worthy dame, fatigued after her labours, fell into a pleasant doze, from which she was rudely awakened—firstly, by the clinking of the bar used by Amos; and, secondly, by the clatter made by the Doctor's steed. Thinking herself pursued by the agents of the Evil One, she had left the place with less dignity than speed, and had consequently frightened the search-party of villagers into fits.

To return to Amos. He had scarcely struck his first blow with the iron bar, he said, when the church seemed to become alive with lights. Thinking that his eyes had played him a trick, he continued his battering operation, when he heard a series of sounds calculated to make the stoutest heart quail—the rattling of bones, the clanking of chains, snorts, groans, footsteps, and the clang of hoofs. Of course Dr. Perran easily accounted for everything in his own mind by a recollection of the movements of his champing and terrified horse—all of which weird noises, followed by ear-splitting and heart-rending shrieks and yells, had reduced Amos's nerves to a state bordering on collapse. He was standing, so he said, in the middle of the chancel in an agony of terror—not knowing whether to remain or run away, whether to pray or curse—his hair on end, his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth, and his knees knocking together like ninepins, when a crowning horror met his gaze. Suddenly a flash as of lightning half-blinded him. Turning his eyes away from the direction whence it had come, he witnessed, to his eternal terror, an apparition of the good saint Elspeth herself, dressed exactly in the fashion with which he had been familiar since his childhood—namely, that depicted in the stained-glass window. There could be no doubt about it whatsoever. He had seen a ghost, and he never wished to see another. No wonder he had dropped down all of a heap where he stood!

Dr. Perrin told Amos what had taken place outside the church, how the horse had broken loose; how he (the doctor) had called to the beast and tried to soothe it with the jargon usual on such occasions—such as, "Whoa, pretty! Coop! Coop! Coop!" and so on—(all of which added to Amos' bewilderment at the time). He described

how a female figure (possibly that of Granny Guingell) had emerged unexpectedly from the porch, and how the old lady had spread the contagion of fear to a number of people from the village who were at that moment entering the churchyard. He explained how the various noises had been mistaken by Amos for supernatural sounds, and attributed the mistake the lad had made to the suggestions of an evil conscience.

Amos admitted the justice of all that the doctor said, but asked in trembling tones—

"But, the ghost? Didn't I see it with my own eyes?"

"What you mistook for a ghost, Amos, was the picture cast on the wall by the rays of the Red Rock lighthouse, as they shone brightly through the saint's window, and reproduced there the stained-glass representation of St. Elspeth."

Amos listened in silence, but remained incredulous. Nothing would ever convince him that he had not seen a ghost; and as nothing ever persuaded him again to enter the church alone, Granny's hoard was left, like the bones of the surrounding dead, to rest in peace.

A BROTHER OF PITY.

At his Monastery door,
When the close of day was come,
With his book of holy lore,
Musing sat the good Jerome—
Looking out with tranquil eyes
At the glorious Eastern skies.

To him came a murmur low
From the peaceful cloistered walk,
Where the Monks passed to and fro,
And across their cheerful talk
Acolytes' young voices clear
Fell upon his dreaming ear.

Out before him stretched the sands,
Far as ever eye could see,
Mile on mile of barren lands
Broken not by shrub or tree;
Save where, at the well hard by,
Rose a palm tree towering high.

Quoth the Prior, "Life is good
Even in this desert air,
All Thy works when understood
Are most beautiful and fair;
True indeed was David's word,
All the earth is Thine, O Lord!"

Suddenly a cry arose,
From the Monks, a cry of dread,
"See yon form that moves and grows,
Creeping on with stealthy tread—
Surely 'tis some evil beast
Seeking for its evening feast!"

"Outlined 'gainst the darkening sky,
'Tis some fearsome beast of prey!
And how fast it draweth nigh—
Come, good Prior, come away—
Look, its fangs are red with gore!
Quick, and let us bar the door!"

"'Tis a Lion from the plain,"
Quoth the Prior in accents calm,
"And the creature seems in pain;
Nay, good brothers, fear no harm—
Hath not said the voice Divine,
All the forest beasts are Mine?"

Vainly did the Monks implore,
For the Prior would not heed:
"Wherefore should we close our door
To a living thing in need?
It perhaps has hither strayed,
Dumbly seeking for our aid."

With his hungry eyes aflame,
And his great mouth open wide,
Limping on, the Lion came,
Halted at the Prior's side,
And with roar subdued and faint
Held his paw up to the Saint.

Marvelling stood the little band,
Such a wondrous sight to see,
As the Monk with practised hand
Took the great paw tenderly,
And with one sharp wrench had drawn
From the wound a cruel thorn.

Then he called for water there,
Washed away the dust and blood,
Bound it up with skilful care—
And as if he understood,
All the while, with patient grace,
Gazed the Lion in his face.

Quoth the Prior, "The wound will heal,
Now, good Lion, go thy way :
He shall share our evening meal,
And no doubt, at break of day,
Of our strange guest we shall find
Only footprints left behind."

But next morning, at the door,
Still the forest king they found,
Holding up his wounded paw,
As he crouched upon the ground :
Waiting thus with trustful eyes
For the good Monk's surgeries.

So the days and weeks wore on,
And the hurt healed sure and slow,
Till all trace of it was gone—
But the Lion would not go !
Yet no lamb in pastures green
Gentler than the beast was seen !

Thus it happened in the end,
That the creature fierce and rude,
Came to be the trusted friend
Of the little brotherhood :
And until the day he died
Never left the Prior's side.

Of his love spake good Jerome—
"In the heavenly citadel,
Where we make our lasting home,
Brother Lion with us shall dwell :
In that land of peace and joy
Where they hurt not nor destroy."

Centuries passed, St. Jerome's name
Rose a star in earth's dark night,
And the lustre of his fame
Filled the Church of Christ with light
Faith's defender, steward wise
Of God's deepest mysteries.

And across the ages dim
Comes this legend of the Saint,
Thus Bellini pictured him,
In a chamber old and quaint,
Reading in his still retreat,
With his Lion at his feet.

Lies no lesson hidden here
In this love so deep and wide,
Holding every creature dear
For the sake of Him who died ?
He who marks the sparrow's fall
Hath a value set for all.

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

OLD UNCLE ABE.

By Ada M. Trotter.

OLD Uncle Abe had the reputation of being the wealthiest man in the State of Vermont.

He had no wife, no child, no relative save a distant cousin, who had deeply offended him by choosing to marry an artist in spite of all his warnings against such a disastrous course. Guy Hallet, however, made a good husband, for he was a worthy young man, but Uncle Abe was faithful to his prejudices, and ignored the daring couple.

"What would become of Uncle Abe's money when Providence saw fit to remove him to a higher sphere?"

This question disturbed the serenity of the townsfolk, who readily adopted the title of "Uncle" in addressing the object of so much solicitude; indeed, to many it came quite natural to say "*dear* Uncle Abe."

Now this story begins on a certain winter day, which for the twenty preceding years had been kept by all as Uncle Abe's birthday, for it came at a slack season and gave everyone an opportunity to do him honour.

His housekeeper, Mrs. Mandy, provided a sumptuous repast for the guests. She was especially famous for her chicken salad, so that report said the very chickens fled at her approach, and "the help" declared herself fairly "tuckered out" with beating eggs for the feast.

On the morning in question one team after another was "hitched up," and the owners, in Sunday array, drove merrily over the snow to the Spring Farm.

"Well, I declare if there isn't Mira Glen with that good-for-nought husband of hers, coming as gay as you please behind us!" said Aunt Sue, grimly, from the recesses of her buffalo rugs. "Now, Susan Jane, I do hope you've got something that will please your uncle this year. Those 'sthetic things he can't abide. He threw the sunflowers down behind the sofa, and says he: 'Got plenty in my garden, Susan Jane, without you bringing them into the house.' He don't take things pleasant when he don't like 'em, don't Uncle Abe!"

"Well, I'm sure," said Jane, "if he don't like 'em, he needn't to; and it's the last thing I'm going to make for him, and no one needn' turn so grumpy at a pair of wool slippers such as these."

She held up a pair of sulphur-green slippers. Aunt Sue shook her head in a dissatisfied manner.

"He won't like anything 'sthetic—you can't expect it of him. He's passed his life 'mongst cows and barns, an' merchants an' money-

grubbin'. I *do* wish you had more sense, Susan Jane. You're your mother over again—jest as shiftless!"

"As for sense," remarked Susan Jane, briefly, "I'd like to know the sense of our going to Uncle Abe's to-day. If you know where it lies, I wish you'd tell *me*, Aunt Sue?"

"You're always such a one for reasons!" snapped Aunt Sue. "We always *have* been for this twelve year and more; 'tisn't likely we're going to give out when there's so many others going."

"More than usual, Susan!" said Uncle Peter, morosely. "I'm downright 'sprised to see Almira. Everyone knows as Uncle Abe told her she'd no business to marry that painting fellow."

"Well, he *do* keep her somehow, and she's a happy woman," said Susan Jane.

"Slaving all the time for her children, and not a new gown to her back since she was married!" snapped Aunt Sue.

Merrily rang the sleigh-bells; truly it did seem as though everyone in the village was to be present to-day. What did it mean?

The hall and parlours were crowded, but Aunt Sue was not above getting her rights by pushing for them, and soon presented herself and niece at the footstool of Uncle Abe. This is of course symbolical, for Uncle Abe had never owned a footstool, and would have scorned its use before company even had he possessed one. His favourite chair, with a high straight back, was set by the hearth, and he was seated, his cheeks distended by a very unamiable grin as he watched the good folk pushing their way to pay him honour. He often turned from the scene to the wood-fire, playing with the logs as if he loved to watch the sparks fly out into the room, keeping people waiting for a word and look until they were scorched by the fierce fire.

"Uncle Abe, many happy returns of the day," said a cheerful voice at his elbow. "We're come, Almira and I; we are quite willing to forgive and forget, since you went to the trouble of asking us to come especially."

Uncle Abe turned and gave a cynical look at the bold speaker, who presented a frank, manly appearance as he pushed forward his blushing little wife.

"Glad enough to make up to the old man!" sneered one, audibly. Uncle Abe glanced round, but he did not speak, nor did he answer the cordial greeting of the young man except by suddenly putting out his hand as if he was glad to see him—a piece of favour jealously noted by the lookers-on.

Presently a lawyer from town, who was watching everything with keen eyes and inscrutable countenance, whispered something to Uncle Abe, and with a nod of assent the old man rose to his feet.

Time had dealt kindly with him and his seventy-two years; he was vigorous, full of life. Many a one looking at him believed the doctor's oft-repeated prophecy—"that Uncle Abe would outlive most of the people who came to pay him court." He had a fine head and face,

and his expression was not unkindly; many people would have rated him as a very simple man, liable to be deceived by his neighbours; a good physiognomist, however, would have seen this contradicted by the keen expression of the large blue eyes. Uncle Abe did not owe his fortune to chance; a shrewder man than he could not be found in Vermont.

"Dear Uncle Abe; how well he looks!" said Aunt Sue, audibly.

The old man's eye rested on her, twinkling with amusement.

"My friends—for I suppose I may call you so?" he began.

"I should hope so," echoed from every side.

"Well, you are all so kind in coming to see a lonely old man, that I thought I'd send for my lawyer to come and help me make a speech to-day."

"He's going to make his will," was the next whisper in circulation, and rapid interchange of ideas on that point made a buzz in the room, only silenced by an imperative call from the lawyer.

"I daresay, now, some of you have wondered what under the sun I mean to do with my money when I'm gone?"

"Oh, no! 'twasn't any of our business," from all.

"Well, it wasn't, and it isn't now; but circumstances have altered with me, and so I mean to explain matters. I've always had an idea, that a man has a perfect right to dispose of his property as he likes."

"Of course, of course!" Perfect unanimity of opinion testified by chorus.

"Well, I'm glad you agree with me. I suppose you'd like to know what I was worth ten years ago. Mr. Stubbs here will tell you."

All eyes were turned on the lawyer, who consulted some notes in his hand, and replied calmly—

"Just over one million, sir."

"Well, I've been more than half a century putting it up," said Uncle Abe; "and I've got no wife or child to leave it to—you all know that."

A chorus of impatient voices replied to this. Uncle Abe was ver long in coming to the point!

"Well, now, I took to thinking a deal on the subject. When I was a poor boy in New York, I fell sick and was carried to the hospital. There I lay for many a week, tended well, and discharged cured, and with a book of good advice given me into the bargain. The first thousand dollars I made that I could spare, I sent to that institution, and I considered that if I divided up my money and left it to half-a-dozen such institutions, I should not be far out of the way. I made a calculation on the foundation that I should only live to be threescore years and ten, and I kept such a sum as I thought would keep me in life as long as that."

Dead silence! Had there been a chorus it would have been of curses on the old man for outwitting them.

Uncle Abe sat down ; and the lawyer began to speak.

"Uncle Abe wishes me to tell you the rest of the story," said he. "I regret to say that the money set aside as a provision for his old age, is lost by a bank failure. He is now too old to enter into active business again, and will have to be indebted to you, his friends, who love him so well, for a home for the rest of his days. His tastes, as you know, are simple, and he will endeavour to repay your kindness by making himself a very agreeable inmate."

The silence of stupefaction which followed this speech was suddenly broken by loud-spoken comments. The lawyer was seized upon as he tried to leave the room, and fruitless efforts were made to extract more details from him ; but he slipped out of the detaining hands before the angry folks could formulate their queries.

Uncle Abe saw everything from his seat by the blazing fire.

"The idea of expecting us to support him ! " he heard from one to whom an hour ago he had been "Dear Uncle Abe."

"He never did anything for us," from another.

"I can't have an old man pottering round my house, anyhow," said another voice.

"Charity begins at home. I've got five children to support."

"There's plenty of room in your house, Aunt Sue—do take him in, and I'll take all the trouble of him," said a pleading voice.

Uncle Abe darted a quick glance at Susan Jane ; he listened intently for the answer.

"You never had a grain of sense in your life, Susan Jane ! Don't you know as like as not he'll live for twenty years or more ? "

"I hope he'll live forty," said Susan Jane. "I'll work for him as long as I have two hands. Do let him come, Aunt Sue."

"Mind your own business ! " said Aunt Sue ; "you don't know nothing of the world. It is easy giving away other folks' victuals ; wait till you've got some of your own."

There was a sob from Susan Jane. Uncle Abe beckoned her to him ; she bent down and kissed him.

"I made some slippers for your birthday," she said. "They're not very pretty, but they're warm. You'll wear them, won't you, Uncle Abe ? "

"Ay, I'll wear them," he said, an odd smile distorting his face as he opened the parcel. "No, they're not pretty, Susan Jane ; they're too green or too yellow, which is it ? Well, I'll wear them. What are you crying for, child ? "

"I was wishing I knew enough to teach school and earn some money," said she. "I guess I could earn enough to keep you, Uncle Abe. Anyhow, I've got ten dollars, that's something. Could you live long on ten dollars, Uncle Abe ? "

Uncle Abe was silent for a while ; then, not being one who took presents gracefully, said, "he guessed he'd have to."

"Uncle Abe," said Almira gently,—the girl whose marriage with

the young artist he had condemned so thoroughly—"Guy has gone to get the sleigh ready, and I am come for you. We hope you will try and put up with the small house and the children; we will make you heartily welcome if you will come to us."

"Ah!" said Uncle Abe, rising with alacrity. "Well! there's nothing like hitting the nail on the head. I'll come now. Mrs. Mandy can give me a few things in a hand-bag, and send the rest after me."

He patted Susan Jane on the head, and smiled as he saw how rapidly the sleighs were driving away from the door; no one had wished him good-bye. He went back and said a few words to his housekeeper.

"Ready, Uncle Abe," said Guy, as he came in hastily. "Come along then."

Mira and Susan Jane buttoned his coat tenderly about him, and nearly smothered him with woollen wraps. Guy gave him his arm down to the sleigh, which was nothing more than a box on runners.

"The children will be glad to see Uncle Abe," said Almira; "they're very fond of company."

The children were on the watch at the door of the small red house where Guy made a home for his wife, and kept the pot boiling by selling his pictures as fast as he could paint them.

* * * * *

A year passed by, and Uncle Abe still sat as a guest at Guy Hallet's table. It would be absurd to suppose that an extra mouth to feed made no difference to the Hallets' household. Guy worked harder at his pictures, and when summer came and there was no sale for them, he might have been seen often at work in the fields helping the farmers during the busy season. Almira worked harder than before to clothe and feed her children on as little as might be; but Uncle Abe was never permitted to feel for a moment that his presence was a tax on the slender resources of the household.

"Your husband's a fine man—uncommon fine," he observed one day to Almira, as Guy came back at noon for his dinner after toiling from early morning in the harvest fields; "but I heard that artist-fellow over at Montpelier say as he'd never be worth anything till he'd been to Europe."

"That's very true," said Guy cheerily, coming in at the door. "But you see, Uncle Abe, if we can't do what is the very best, we must take the second best; and I have to go lower still to third or fourth—for I have to teach myself as I go along."

"I've never been to Europe," said Uncle Abe, after a long silence. "I think I must go some day or other."

Husband and wife exchanged a look of amusement. Uncle Abe often spoke as if he had command of a fortune still. Susan Jane spent all her spare time at the Hallets', and an odd kind of affection grew up between her and the lonely old man.

"Susan Jane," he said, one day, "would you like to finish your education in Europe?"

Susan Jane clasped her hands in ecstasy. "Oh, Uncle Abe, if only wishes were any use! I've wished to go to Europe ever since I knew enough to wish for anything," she replied.

"Ah!" he said, nodding his head.

When the harvesting was over, the dinners began to get very meagre —some of Guy's pictures were sent back as unsaleable. Almira, as she pinched herself that others might have more to eat, was tormented by a hacking cough which was obstinate in refusing to be cured by common remedies. Guy began to look very sober whilst he was at work, but after all, there was an element of cheerfulness always diffused throughout the household by the bright-faced Almira.

"I want you to ask Susan Jane to dinner on Sunday," said Uncle Abe, one day. It was the Sunday of Thanksgiving week. Susan came, and though the dinner was a meagre affair, everyone was so bright and cheerful that it might have been a feast which was spread on the snow-white cloth. After dinner they sat round the fire, and Uncle Abe said he'd tell them a story. It was a long round-about tale of an old man who was very rich and who wanted his money to pass into good hands, and so he tried to prove the sincerity of his friends by pretending to be very poor.

"Well, well!" said gentle Almira. "I think he ought not to feel very angry when he was disappointed in their behaviour, because he had no business to deceive them in that way, you know. He must not judge them too hardly"—for the old man's eyes had flashed as he told the story.

Uncle Abe laughed; there was a knock at the door just then, and in walked Mr. Stubbs the lawyer. He came in with a merry twinkle in his eye, and joined the happy circle round the fire.

"Have you taken the passages?" said Uncle Abe, presently.

"Yes, here they are!" said he, smiling, as he put an envelope in the old man's hand.

"Well, then, I think we'd better arrange our plans," said he. "Guy, give me my spectacles and take a look at these. Can you be ready to sail in a fortnight, Almira?"

"Why, these are tickets for an ocean steamer," cried Guy, looking at the lawyer for a meaning, thinking Uncle Abe was suddenly bereft of his senses.

"Well, the fact is, I'm about tired of playing at poverty, and I'm going to give it up," said Uncle Abe. "I've a fancy that Almira's cough wants care, and Guy here and Susan Jane want more education; so, children, if you are willing to share an old man's wanderings, away we go to Europe before the month is out."

* * * * *

The astonishment of the townsfolk knew no bounds; jealousy of the Hallets, and wrath at their own short-sighted folly, filled their cup

of mortification to overflowing. They seized the lawyer and insisted on pouring out their reasons for keeping aloof from Uncle Abe to his unwilling ears.

"We thought he'd lost everything," said one.

"Ah, so did Guy Hallet!" said the lawyer, quietly.

"And didn't he leave all his money to the hospitals?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Is it true that he has made his will?"

"Quite true," was the reply. "I have his permission to say that Almira, Guy, and Susan Jane will share the estate after his death; and, until that time, will be the recipients of a handsome income. Uncle Abe is worth a good two millions."

"And they are all going to Europe?"

"Yes! Susan Jane is going to Paris to school, and Guy with his wife and children and Uncle Abe are going to winter in Italy. And if Guy Hallet doesn't turn out one of the first artists in the world, my name's not Joseph Stubbs!"

A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

By C. J. Langston.

Once a year the clouds are parted,
When in undertone I hear,
Blessings from the kindly-hearted,
Distant voices coming near.

Long ago the happy meeting,
Fuller friendship since avowed;
Long ago, and still the greeting
Breaks through Christmas cold and cloud.

Other times, so great the distance,
Never swells the slightest sound;
Stronger than the soul's resistance,
Are the vapours which surround.

But the year is light with gladness,
When the Birth of Christ draws nigh;
And the joy-bells cleave the sadness,
Shaking blessings from the sky.

IN A CATHEDRAL.

By Gilbert H. Page.

FROM the ordeal of the family breakfast-table, from the torturing remarks and surmises of the wholly indifferent, Eva Mesurier escaped at the earliest possible moment out-of-doors. At her heart was a new and sharper pain. Hitherto there had always remained a hope, however improbable. Now the song was out, the book closed, the door upon the past for ever shut.

As Miss Mesurier walked through the Cathedral Close, the first drops of a coming shower fell in big splashes upon the flagged pathway, the summer sky rapidly darkened, the birds were silent in the leafy recesses of the lime-trees. Ten o'clock service was just over, and the handful of people emerging from the western door glanced up at the clouds, opened umbrellas, and hurried past her with lifted skirts and down-bent heads. "I had better go inside until it is over," she decided; and at that moment the rain descended with the suddenness, swiftness and force only seen in July rain-storms. Sheets of water seemed to suspend themselves from the Cathedral walls, torrents poured from the gaping mouth of every gargoyle, rivulets ran foaming along every gutter and side path. But just by reason of this falling wall of water, which thus appeared to isolate it from the rest of the world, Eva found the cold and solemn spirit of the Cathedral more consoling than ever before.

She knew the place well outside and in; for years every stone and corner had been familiar to her. She could have found her way blindfolded through the long drawn aisles from shrine to shrine; she could point out when the harebell trembled on its delicate stem, high up on the coping above the "Slype Gate"; but most faithfully had she kept the secret of the starlings' nest in the tracery over the little northern door. The serried pillars, the ever-succeeding arches, the loftiness, the silence, the white light falling from windows whose mediæval glories were shattered by Cromwell's troops, the dim recesses and shadowy-filled corners, exercised a charm upon her ever new and ever strange. The old walls whispered to her their secrets; she saw the whole marvellous building as it first existed, an idea in the brain of one man. She watched its creation; she followed the thoughts of those who built it; the stories of the men and women who had prayed in it or walked through it ever since; she communed with the gentle ghosts of the dead who lie buried beneath the pavements, and, ceding to the magic of their silent voices, she let them carry her soul away from a cold and narrow present to sunny dreams of the past—sometimes into the mysterious past of æons ago, sometimes into the dearly-loved past of a few years since.

To-day, as she wandered aimlessly along the matted aisles, reverie at once began to steal over her, for some one was practising on the organ, and a wondrous melody awoke beneath skilfully-pressed fingers, now rising triumphant and rolling away into the shadows of the groined roof, now sinking into plaintive cadences, which floated out through the open doors, to lose themselves in the ever-falling rain. Myriads of flashing hues seemed to descend straight from heaven, and to break into drops which rebounded high in air as they struck the pavement.

The Cathedral was not quite empty. Two young men stood by St. Lutolf's shrine; strangers evidently, for one read from a guide-book, and a verger in his rusty black gown conversed with the other. What was there in the turn of this man's head, in the broad tweed-covered shoulders, that made such a strange feeling, half terror, half rapture, catch at Eva's heart? But when she saw his face, as he moved to speak to his friend, the old disappointment was renewed.

The music played on.

Eva sat in her favourite seat in the transept, looking out through the open door. At her feet was the gravestone of a woman whose writings had peopled the world with bright children of the imagination —with girls witty, charming, good; young men grave and gay; with valetudinarians who impose no burden, with rattles who cannot weary, with bores who cannot bore; who has made the names of these immortal with her own so long as books shall last. But a woman who, for all her fame, missed the best of life, who never had a child to call her mother, who never knew the warmth of happy love. Does fame make up for the want of these things?

The music still played on.

She mused upon the mystery of life—its waste of powers, its frustration of predestined ends. Here one with treasures of love and devotion to lavish is pushed by circumstance aside; there another seeking this very treasure passes blindly by to break his heart and lose his life in the search.

The spirit of the dead poet, whose passionate verse lives for ever in the hearts of his lovers, passed close to Eva, walking through the aisle he had paced so assiduously for a short space of time in his short life. Following him came spectres of his poverty, his genius, his despair; of the girl, cold and inappreciative, who carried in a careless hand the letters he had written her, and which were destined to be sold one day for money to a curious public; of the friend who understood what friendship means, and watched out the long death-agony beneath Italian skies. Eva herself wandered over the Campagna, walked with eager steps through the sunny streets of Rome; saw, fancifully, sights and peoples she was never in reality to see, tasted in imagination the perfect joy she was never in reality to know.

The music still played on.

There was no one now in the Cathedral but the young man in the tweed suit. He was standing at a little distance from her, looking

towards her. The light from the great west window fell upon his head and face. Ah, her first impression had been right, after all! It was unmistakably Marcus Eversley. Wonderful delicious fortune which threw them thus again together! He came immediately over to her, his eyes alight with the interest tempered by deference which had always thrilled her. He gave the odd little bow she remembered so well.

"Who would have thought of finding you here?" he said. "What an unexpected pleasure! Are you staying in the town?"

"We have been living here long," she answered, rather bewildered.

"Not so very long," he corrected, with a smile. "It is not so very long, surely, since we were rowing together in Morecambe Bay? Do you remember?"

Could she forget the happiest topmost hour of all the happy hours that she had known him? Again the boat seemed to rise and swell upon the glittering, green, evening waters; the rosy radiance of the after-glow spread half over the heavens, and the tapering masts of the shipping were outlined delicately against it; the hulks, the barges, all the crazy, picturesque buildings that jostled together to the very harbour's edge, made a broad and black division between sea and sky. Marcus rested on his oars and looked at her just as though he were going to speak. Between terror and joy the moment was intensely painful; and then suddenly she read in his eyes that some stronger impulse checked the words as they were about to flow, and the desire left him. But, for all that, the moment lived a golden one in her memory, for in it she had partially divined his feelings for her.

"Have you still your passion for all water?" he said. "Do you remember our little stream, so swift and clear, which runs between the tall grasses of our meadows at Upton? Do you remember how we sat there together and looked at the silver minnows slipping over the sandy bottom, our own faces smiling up at us from a background of blue June heaven, the summer flies dimpling the water's surface? Shall we sit there again one day? Though it is pleasant enough, too, to sit with you here, and curious for me to be thus talking with you above the graves of the dead."

The music still played on.

Eva looked at the strong, calm face of the man beside her, at its beauty and its power, at its intense vitality, and the old familiar disbelief in death, that had been wont to lay hold of her at uncertain times, once more possessed her. It was well for reason to assert that she herself must die; for experience to prove that other people did die. When she looked at Marcus she refused to credit that death and he could have anything in common. Those meaning eyes could never become dim and sightless; that ruddy cheek could never lose its glow; the virile hand, so capable for work, so prompt for defence, could never hang inert and powerless, any more than she herself, in whose veins to-day youth and health and happiness coursed with long-

forgotten vigour, should ever become old and listless, indifferent and cold.

"You shall teach me some more wild flowers," he went on. "I have not forgotten your lesson in the woods at Arlington. Golden rod and golden ragwort, purple scabious and purple agrimony. You see I remember them all. Was not that a walk—over the bare hills and down to the heart of the wood, last year's dry leaves carpeting the ground beneath our feet, the trees full of sunshine that fell in splashes of gold upon the path before us, upon the wayside mosses, upon your dress! I remember that white dress of yours so well. Do you wear it still?"

"And," said Eva musingly, "when at last we left the woods and followed the others over the village green to that curious, old-fashioned inn where we had tea."

"And where I took you by the arm, and said, 'Now I will show you a pretty woman'; and there was your own image smiling out at you from a blurred and ancient looking-glass."

"Yes, it was silly, was it not? Yet I was pleased that you were pleased, and so I think I really did look well that day."

"Never was there such a capital meal as we then sat down to—such home-made bread, such butter and honey! And afterwards, when we found our way upstairs to the village assembly-room, and one of our party sat down to the loose-voiced piano and gave us waltzes, do you remember how we danced—you and I—round the empty room, while the summer gloaming gathered thick in the corners, and every moment through the open windows we saw the sky assume a deeper, darker blue? Do you remember?"

"And the drive home, when Jupiter, hanging low over the forest, began to assume his supremacy for the night. And the harbour lights, that dropped long, trembling reflections in the water; and the silent, empty streets; and how you stood with us all at the garden-gate while we said good-night. And how friendly you seemed, and yet the immense time you let slip before you came to see us again. Do you remember that?"

The music still played on.

"Do you not know why?" said Marcus, very earnestly. "I was afraid of myself, and I was not sure of you. I loved you, but I was proud, and I wanted a sign. And you were always as good and gay with all the world as you were with me; in fact, you seemed even more light-hearted when in company with others. Do you not remember?"

"That was the sign. How could you fail to understand it? With the world one can smile and be gay; with the beloved, one is silent through terror and through joy. But you never came to me for sympathy in vain; you never expressed the faintest wish to which I did not instantly respond. You had but to shake the bough ever so slightly, and the fruit would have fallen at your feet. But it was

not doubt of this that stayed your hand. There must have been something else. Do you not remember?"

"It is true," said he, "there were other things. I was young, and life with so many untried chances lay before me; I did not want to take an irrevocable step so soon. Then I was poor, I had my way to make; it seemed wiser to walk free. I was ambitious; it seemed easier to rise alone. I said to myself, 'Time enough in ten years, and though I lose her, there will still be fair fresh faces, kind eyes, and sweet lips to choose from.' For then I understood all these things very dimly. Now I know that the gift which I would not stretch out my hand to take was offered me by God Himself, and that there was none other like it in the world for me. I am telling you everything at last, Eva. Can you forgive me?"

"You are giving me Heaven. What is there to forgive?"

* * * * *

The music had ceased.

Eva lifted her eyes. She was alone; the cathedral was empty. Through the open door she saw the rain had ceased too. The outside landscape, bathed again in strong sunlight, with every wet and glittering leaf flashing back like a looking-glass the colours of the sky, appeared, seen through these open doors, some brilliant jewel-picture set in the framework of grey stone wall.

There was a clinking of keys, and the organist let himself out at the iron gates dividing chancel from transept. As he approached, Eva saw it was young Dell, one of Dr. Armstrong's pupils. He stopped to speak to her.

"If I were to come round this afternoon about four, should I find Eva at home, do you suppose?"

It was of course for the Eva of a younger generation that the other Eva answered: "I will tell her you are coming."

"Oh, she wouldn't stay in for that!" remarked the boy ruthfully, but with such an obvious desire to be contradicted in his face that Miss Mesurier smiled.

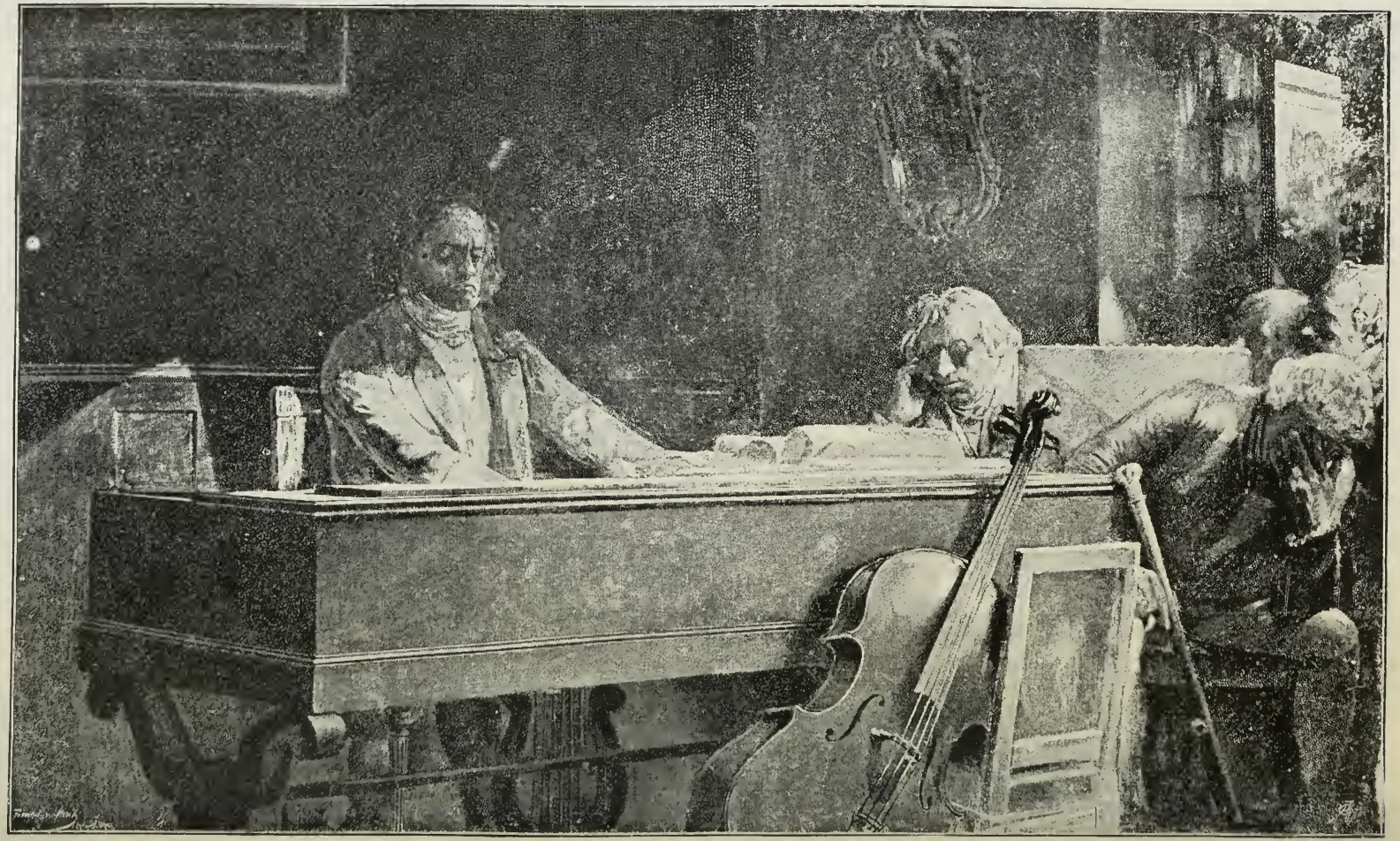
"We shall see!" she said gently.

The young fellow blushed and grew embarrassed. He sought to turn the conversation.

"What did you think of those voluntaries I was playing? But—it's awfully rude of me, I know—but really you look as though you had been asleep!"

"I don't think that I have been asleep," said Eva; "but I was dreaming, perhaps."

Yes, dreaming that she was young again; that Marcus Eversley who had never spoken, who had drifted apart from her, of whom she had not heard for years, until with a sudden dreadful heart-pang she had read of his death in that morning's paper, was alive and young too, and that he loved her with the passion she had vainly spent on him.



Until the miracle of music works
Under the Master's hands,
And breathes a secret message to each soul,
That each soul understands!

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THE MIRACLE OF MUSIC.

THE music flows beneath Beethoven's touch
And finds mysterious way
To golden memories hid in all men's hearts,
Though heads be bowed and grey.

For, as the stately harmony floats by,
A vision of life's morn
Rises for one. Two figures, hand in hand,
Walking among the corn.

He sees the sunlight die along those fields,
And there comes out a star,
And then a little white sail glides from sight
Beyond the harbour bar.

They never met again who parted then
On that still autumn strand;
Yet surely on his soul there falls to-night
Touch of an unseen hand!

Then one—so old and lonely—lives again
In childhood's merry days.
What matter that the world forget or scorn?
He hears his mother's praise.

Next, in a heart grown somewhat hard and cold,
A long-forgotten face
Rises upon the music's softest tone,
And smiles from its old place.

Ah, could she but come back again to-night
(He knows not if she lives)
He would unsay some cruel words—and yet
He feels that she forgives!

And one, who dreamed good dreams and made them true,
Whose life has been a psalm,
Mounts on the melody to mystic realms
Where all is glad and calm.

Where, though grand problems and great tasks remain,
All helpless tears are done,
And man goes joyfully to work with God
Because they are at one!

For as mute exiles in unkindly crowds
Their home-sick memories bear,
So souls sit lonely in those hidden depths
No other soul can share.

Until the miracle of music works,
Under the Master's hands,
And breathes a secret message to each soul,
That each soul understands!

ISABELLA FYVIE MAYO.

AUNT ORSOLA.

I.

"ANNA *mia*, you are the luckiest girl in the world!"

Perhaps she was—you shall judge for yourself—but she certainly did not look as if she herself thought so.

The two sisters were pacing slowly down the one broad walk of their ill-kept garden. To their left lay the vineyard, to their right the house and its narrow strip of flower-garden in which huge oleanders bloomed and bushes of scarlet geranium blossomed, interspersed with such plants as could brave the red ochreous soil and the almost ever-beating sun. All wore an arid look—from the cracked plaster and blistered paint of the house to the dry, yellow grass that untidily bordered the path upon which the girls were lingering. But the spell of Italian loveliness lay upon all, and rendered almost beautiful what would have been unbearable in other lands.

In front of the little dwelling a vineyard terraced down to the shimmering sea; right and left undulating hills thickly clad with olive trees; behind them a chain of craggy heights, here and there crowned with feathery pines, but more often towering, bold and bare, and contrasting their red brown hues with the pure blue overhead.

Add to this the odour of aromatic herbs mingling with that of brine; the song of the cigala; a flood of golden sunshine steeping the earth and caressing the slumbering sea; and you will have an outline of the scene in which Anna and Cordelia were wandering, and amid which they had been born.

Though respectively seventeen and eighteen they can indeed scarcely be said ever to have lived elsewhere. For their father, Count Altamonte, had died while they were quite children; and, immediately after her husband's death, the Countess had retired permanently to the only property that remained to her, there to live in seclusion with her daughters upon the pittance that fell to them after the payment to the last centesimo of the Count's debts.

They were, as the Italians say, "noble as the sun and poor as the moon." But they all three bore their poverty bravely, and made the best they were able of the privations it imposed. They wore their cotton dresses to the last verge of possibility; took an interest in all the little vicissitudes of their rustic neighbours—they had no others—went to mass on Sundays at the little church on the beach below; and, all things considered, led a peaceful, if a monotonous life.

The house itself—it was not a cottage, for, unfortunately, in our

sense of the word, there *are* no cottages in Italy—would have been discomfort itself in any other land. The walls were stencilled; the floors of red brick, the furniture scant. And yet it was pleasant enough with the balmy summer wind setting the red cotton curtains softly waving, and with the song of the birds and the scent of the brine floating freely in through the widely opened windows and doors. And in winter, too, it was not without a certain cheeriness with a fire of mingled olive-wood and pine-cones blazing upon the only hearth the house possessed; save that in the kitchen, on which you could have roasted an ox whole, and which was never used unless on washing days; the modest cooking of the establishment being daily done on a brick range over a handful of charcoal.

The entire household numbered but five persons: the Contessa, her two daughters, and an old couple, Gianbattista and his wife Erminia; the former, vinedresser, gardener, and all else that might be required; the latter, housekeeper, cook and laundress. They had been with Countess Altamonte for over twenty years, and would have flung themselves into the fire to do either of their three mistresses a service. But neither of them was ever hard-taxed, mother and daughters being both kindly and amiable, and therefore not difficult to please. Added to that, the old couple seemed to find repose more wearisome than work. They were incessantly busy about something, save on Sundays; then, after mass, Battista might ever have been seen sitting in the sun or the shade, according to the season, in all the solemnity of horn spectacles and holiday clothes, puffing away at a well-blackened pipe; while Erminia, in blue spotted print and white apron, went the rounds upon a general inspection of all that the property produced. Nothing ever escaped her—from the purloining of a peach, or the abduction of a chicken, up to the going wrong of a wine vat, or the appearance of disease among the vines. Her sharp old eyes ferreted out everything.

"Yes, Anna," repeated Cordelia, "you are a lucky girl. Just think what a change!"

"Change, indeed! And it's just that——"

Anna paused in step and speech, stooped to pluck a sprig of thyme, turned slowly and seated herself upon the low, broad stone bench they had just passed. Cordelia sat down beside her.

Here and there a ray of sunshine penetrated the boughs of the venerable ilex overhead, to fall in splashes of golden light upon the two sisters—upon Cordelia's red-brown coil of hair and pink-and-white complexion, upon Anna's raven tresses and creamy skin. The soft dark eyes of the latter were dreamily fixed upon the shimmering sea below.

"Does it grieve you so to leave us, then?" She laid her head upon her sister's shoulder as she spoke.

"Yes, that it does—to the very heart."

"But it cannot be for very long, Anna. Aunt Orsola—grand-aunt, I should say—must be very old, and——"

"Yes, I know; and I've tried to reconcile myself to the change; but I cannot—I cannot."

"A change from night to day, almost from poverty to enormous wealth."

"Ah, Cordelia, I wish she had chosen you." I wonder if mamma were to write and propose your going instead——"

"Anna, it would be worse than useless. We have never seen Aunt Orsola—mamma never saw her but once, just before her marriage, yet we know what people say about her—full of antiquated notions—something like a mania in all that regards the nobility and dignity of her race."

"She has never thought of us in our poverty all these long years."

"Well, that's true; but the case was different. While her nephew lived, she had an heir in the male line."

"Poor fellow! What a pity he didn't stay at home instead of going to Africa and getting killed. I heartily wish he was alive again. And then, think of our aunt's insisting that there is to be no communication—that I am to be cut off from all I love. That I am—oh, she's a cruel old woman, that's what she is!"

"She's half mad, as I said before. And no wonder, considering the solitary life she leads, shut up, year after year, in that old feudal castle of hers."

"Battista knows the place. He lived on the estate when a boy. He must have seen our aunt. And then there's——" Anna stopped short and sighed.

"Yes, I know, Anna. Poor Alberto! But do you think mamma would have allowed you to marry him? With our nobility and name—a simple farmer almost?"

"I am sure of it. Poor mamma has had a hard time of it; she has learned that family without fortune is but a mockery. We haven't a relation in the wide world but Aunt Orsola, and she only deigned to notice us when she needed us. She had much better have left us in peace. She could leave her money to a hospital."

"And her name and title?" asked Cordelia.

"I, for one, don't wish ever to be Marchioness della Rocca d'Oro. I could have been so happy here!"

Tears welled up into Anna's dark eyes as she said this. They blurred the brightness of the rippling waters upon which she was gazing. Another vision, too, rose before her. The stalwart young proprietor of a somewhat extensive and near-lying property; handsome, kindly, open-hearted and deeply in love. The thought was too much, Anna lay her head upon her sister's shoulder and wept outright.

What a happy past was that which now floated up from memory's mystic depths! The iris hues hindered aught less bright and beautiful than themselves from rising. Maternal and sisterly love, Battista and Erminia's affection. Then the innocent idyll that in the golden

sunshine, and amid the many-hued loveliness of her birthplace, had grown up to its present strength and beauty. The timid glances at mass, the occasional meeting of fingers at the Holy Font; the excursions up among the breezy heights, Alberto carefully leading his quietest horse, and doing all in his power to spare the Countess the smallest shock or jolt; she and Cordelia gaily leading the van, and springing like young goats amid the rocks and rosemary bushes; Battista and Erminia bringing up the rear with the provisions for the day. Alberto's first flowers, his unconnected, yet well understood words, the rosy Eden that suddenly blossomed around her, as one evening, on the little terrace overlooking the sea and beneath the white moonlight, the confession of mutual love had been sealed by a kiss. All, and a hundred times more, floated up before her, till, with a heart-broken voice, she cried, "Cordelia, Cordelia, I cannot, cannot go!"

"But what is to be done, dearest?"

"I don't know; but I will not go. Oh, yes"—correcting herself—"*you* must take my place! If one of us two is to become Marchioness Rocca d'Oro, it must be you, not I."

"But how, Anna?"

"I'm not quite sure yet; I must think it out well. You just help me to learn all I can about Aunt Orsola."

"It won't be much; nobody seems really to know her. We'll ask Battista."

"Battista can hardly tell us more than we know," said Anna. "Orsola Marchesa della Rocca d'Oro in her own right is a maiden of eighty, of enormous wealth. I think mamma said she never married because she couldn't find any one whose blood was sufficiently blue. She lives, shut up in her castle, as much as she possibly can, like her ancestors of a hundred years ago."

"Well, I don't know that I should object to that, Anna. I dare say the life is——"

"But I object. I'd rather share a hut with Alberto than possess all Rocca d'Oro!"

"Poor Anna! Well, what more?"

"That's all, I think. Oh, she hates progress, and says railroads are the invention of Satan."

"I don't see what excuse you can ever find. Have you asked Alberto to help you?"

"Yes; but he refused flatly. No one, he declared, should ever be able to say that he had uttered one word to hinder my going. Dear, noble, stupid fellow!"

"That's just like Alberto! I was sure——" Erminia's shrill voice calling them to their noonday dinner interrupted Cordelia's phrase. The two sisters rose and, hand in hand, proceeded towards the house.

II.

It was a pretty picture. Alberto leaning over the little gate, his muscular arms reposing comfortably upon the topmost bar, and his admiring loving gaze fixed upon Anna within; she standing with her coarse straw hat in her hand, and from time to time raising her soft dark eyes to his. The spreading pine overhead flung chequered shadows, soft and swaying, down upon the lovers, and now and again a prying sunbeam would steal in as if to peer at them. They never noted the golden spy, however, so wrapped up were they in themselves and each other. Nor did they notice the approaching steps of Cordelia and old Battista, she with a basket in her hand, he carrying one of those long bamboo canes, the upper end of which is split into a sort of funnel kept open by a cork and secured with wire—the implement with which, in primitive Italy, fruit is gathered from the tops of the high trees.

"We are going to get some figs for mamma," said Cordelia, stopping. "I think there must be some ripe by now. Will you come, Alberto?"

With a glad smile the young man opened the little gate and entered, The four took their way across the vineyard over to where an enormous fig-tree raised its leafy head. The warm air was redolent with the aroma of rosemary, southernwood, lavender, and a hundred aromatic herbs, while, from time to time, a fresher whiff floated up from below, bringing with it the acrid odour of brine. The cigala sang merrily in the golden sunshine, and the idle swish of waters upon the sands made itself heard at intervals. Three young voices rang out clearly, however, to which Battista's bass was now and again added. They were all so happy; all was so beautiful and bright around, the sunshine of heart and heaven had put to flight, for the moment, even Aunt Orsola's menacing image.

Under the fig-tree they all sat down, the girls upon a flat yellow stone, the two men upon the red, roughly-hoed soil in front. Battista mopped away at his old bald head with a red cotton handkerchief that smelt strongly of stale tobacco; Alberto drew out a couple of cigars and fumbled in his numerous pockets for the needful matchbox; the girls fanned themselves, and, at times, also the two men, with their wide-brimmed hats.

"Now, Battista," said Cordelia, "we want you to tell us all you know about Aunt Orsola and Rocca d'Oro."

"About Rocca d'Oro as much as you please; but about Signora Marchesa—well, I don't know what I can tell you. I scarcely ever saw her to speak to, and if I had to tell you all that the rest used to say about her, why, we should sit her till to-morrow. My memory, too, is so bad——"

"Here's a cigar to help it," said Alberto, handing him one.

The old man's dark eyes flashed with delight as he took it and lit

it, with a gusto that was pleasant to see. A cigar, and especially a good one like that, was a rare treat. A briarwood pipe and doubtful tobacco were his ordinary solace.

"What used they to say?"

"Oh, a thousand things—each stranger than the other."

"For example—?"

"Who can tell now? It is so long, long ago. And then, every one had something different. They even declared she was a sorceress and had made compact with——"

Battista broke off and crossed himself.

"But that's impossible, you know. You don't mean to say you believe that?"

"I can't tell," replied Battista; "I believe and I don't believe. She has a bad name all around, anyhow, in spite of her money."

"Yes?"

"What with her pride, her cats, and her geology——"

"Her what?"

"Her geology. The picture of a great tree; it hangs in the big hall, and instead of fruit it bears dukes, and marquesses, and princes. It is quite full of them. And her ladyship stands before it for hours, they say. I've even heard say it's a sort of Satan's mass-book—God forgive me!—and that she is bound to worship before it for a certain time every day. I myself saw her there once. They say she speaks to the princes and dukes, and once she was seen crying before them. If that's not sorcery, I don't know what is! She calls it geology, but other folk——"

"Genealogy, Battista. If you had ever dared look, you would have seen our name—mamma's, at least—there also."

"The saints forbid! I——"

"And the cats?" interrupted Anna.

"She used to have eight of them. They dined and supped with her; and they all had names."

"Well, they, at least, must be dead and gone long ago. Why, it's years and years——"

"Dead! Gone! You think so! They're no such thing"—here he lowered his voice. "They were no more real cats than we are."

"What are they, then?"

"The spirits of the dukes and princes painted upon the tree. There were beasts painted there, too; but beasts such as none of us ever saw—monsters—one woman with the tail of a fish, a green lion with—— it was the devil's book, I'm sure," concluded Battista, rising and picking up his cane, "and nothing will ever take the belief out of me. And you, Miss Anna, you just take old Tista's advice and keep away from Rocca d'Oro as far as ever you can."

Alberto could have hugged him for those words.

III.

The long, tiresome journey came to an end at last, and Anna found herself safely deposited at the Ivrea station. The town, once famous in Italian history, can still boast of many records of turbulent feudal times. Nowadays, however, it is noted for nothing in particular, save its carnival, which is still held with much gaud and glitter, and whose procession of armed knights, in the panoply and gear of dead centuries, issuing from the frowning old walls, gives no weak idea of gallants of days gone by thronging to a tournament.

The Piedmontese are certainly the English of Italy, and, going a step further, the people of the Canevesato and Monferrato may be likened to the Scotch. They are hardy, pugnacious, fiery, tenacious, and conservative to the backbone.

The nobility of these two districts is among the purest and best in the land; and of this nobility Orsola, Marchesa della Rocca d'Oro considered herself the culminating point.

To a certain extent her pretensions had been allowed, for the family—now reduced to her stately self and two penniless grandnieces whom nobody knew anything about—had certainly, in days gone by, been the first among all. Nobody could deny that. Nobody did deny it. But as time went on Orsola della Rocca secluded herself entirely from a world which she declared to be turning upside down, and buried herself amidst her boundless forests and broad lands, hugging her peculiar ideas more and more tenaciously, growing more and more reserved, and thus yearly widening the gulf between herself and the rest of mankind.

She gave money freely, when asked by her chaplain to do so; but unaccompanied by any outward sign of sympathy. Thus, to the worthy, at least, depriving the gift of half its value.

Her antiquated body-guard, Brigitta, seemed to be the only person for whom she ever openly expressed sympathy. Brigitta and her cats! For the descendants of the feline pets, mentioned by Battista, still flourished at the castle, though reduced to six.

With her usual despotic eccentricity the old lady had dictated the minutest particulars of Anna's journey. Her mother and sister were to accompany her to Ivrea, consign her to Brigitta, who would be there to receive her, and then, without an hour's delay, return whence they had come. Her letter had enclosed a note of a thousand francs for travelling expenses.

Countess Altamonte had obeyed to the letter, but with a heavy heart. Nothing but her own poverty on the one side, and the enormous fortune at stake on the other, could ever have decided her. For the fortune *was* enormous, and would render one of her daughters, at least, perhaps the greatest heiress in Italy. Under any other circumstances Anna would have enjoyed the drive in that huge,

antiquated coach, with its four fat horses, bewigged driver, and liveried servants.

Such scenery as they passed through was utterly new to her, and entirely different from that of her Southern home—undulating fields and rows of mulberry-trees, green hedges and shadowy lanes; white homesteads peeping forth from groups of enormous walnut-trees; a broad, level, well-kept high road, along which the carriage bowled without swerve or jolt.

At last they turned aside and began to wind amid the sinuosities of ever-rising hills.

"The Contessina is now upon the lands of her illustrious aunt," said Brigitta, in a solemn tone.

The old lady looked as if she expected the girl to reply by some indication of respectful awe. But she did nothing of the sort. She wiped her eyes and gazed sadly and indifferently out of the window.

Brigitta was sitting bolt upright opposite her. She would as soon have thought of eating meat on Friday as of occupying a seat together with one who had della Rocca blood in her veins. The good woman had been all her long life so saturated with the grandeur of the family, that she had almost come to regard them as something quite apart from the rest of mankind.

Up they wound among the hills—now between green banks overshadowed with hazel and elder; now across miniature prairies covered with short, juicy grass; here along a gentle stream, in whose clear, brown waters the pale stems of the beaches and the blue sky overhead mirrored themselves; there skirting a rock-bound torrent churning itself into foam amid the boulders; past fern-clad nook, smiling mead, shady glade, frowning forest; yet ever up, up, up, till at last, grim and grey, the towers of the castle showed amid the oaks and firs.

Anna's heart beat fast as the equipage drew up at the grand entrance. She sickened as she thought of the dear old home, so different and so far away! But there was no time for thought, for Brigitta stood waiting to help her out.

"And whatever you do, Contessina, do not forget the three reverences—the first just inside the door, the second——"

But the old woman's whispered instructions were cut suddenly short by Anna's pulling herself together with an effort, springing past, and bounding up the broad perron and across the lordly threshold with as little ceremony as if she had once more been at the farmhouse.

"Santa Maria!" exclaimed the astounded Abigail, as she gazed after the girl with open mouth and distended eyes. "What will the Marchioness——"

Anna disappeared within.

For a moment or two she could distinguish nothing. Then, little by little, as out of a mist, objects loomed forth. An enormous hall with a gigantic staircase to the right; figures in full armour against the

lofty walls; above them trophies of arms and tattered banners; a dozen or so of full-length portraits, black, indistinct, spectre-like. At the further end a dais surmounted by a canopy—the della Roccas were "Marchesi del Baldacchino"—that is, they had held and executed right of jurisdiction in times gone by—and furnished with a species of unwieldy arm-chair, huge and worn, once velvet and gilding, but now retaining few traces of its ancient splendour.

Beside this chair, and from which she had evidently risen, stood a little old lady with dark, lustrous eyes, puffs of snowy hair surmounted by an indescribable fabric of lace, and in a dress such as had long vanished from the modes of earth.

On her left stood an aged priest and two elderly gentlemen; on her right, but quite in the background, a number of servants, male and female, the former in full livery, the latter all clad alike.

For a second Anna faltered, for her heart began to fail her. Then fortunately her eyes fell upon the famous genealogical tree with its emblazoned ramifications, and at the sight fresh courage awoke. Mother and sister, Alberto and Battista, started up before her; and, with Tista's word "geology" sounding in her ears, she stepped forward. Almost before she knew where she was she found herself face to face with her eccentric relative. In a trice she had stepped upon the dais and kissed the old lady upon both cheeks. Then, half terrified at what she had done, she caught hold of the arm of the chair for support, and, with downcast eyes, awaited what was to come.

The silence was appalling, and was all unbroken save by a series of inarticulate sounds from the lips of the petrified grand-aunt. The sounds grew more distinct, then finally resolved themselves into the one word "Ma-de-moi-selle!"

One word only, it is true, but a single word, each syllable of which contained a volume. Amazement, dismay, anger, horror, were each and all clearly indicated.

"Ma-de-moi-selle!" was repeated in fainter tones; and then the bewildered châtelaine sank back within the friendly arms of the seat behind her.

There was a murmur among the spectators, none of whom, however, ventured to interfere by either word or sign.

"Dear aunt," said Anna, laying one of her thoroughbred but terribly sunburnt hands upon the old lady's shoulder, "I am very sorry. I ought not to have been so abrupt, but I am very impulsive; and as you, after mamma and Cordelia, are my nearest relative, pray forgive me! You'll get used to me in time."

"Get used to you!" repeated the old lady in a faint troubled tone that sounded like an echo, and gazing up into her niece's face. "Get used to you!"

"Yes, of course you will. One of you there, bring a glass of water. Do you feel faint, aunt?"

One of the servants hurried out to obey the order. He gave a

meaning glance as he passed his fellows. It meant, "the old one has got her match there."

A fresh murmur among the bystanders and a step towards the centre of attraction.

"She can't be a Rocca d'Oro—she must be a changeling," murmured the old marchioness, whose eyes had never been withdrawn from Anna's face. None but Anna heard the remark, so low was the tone in which it was uttered.

The reply to it, however, rang out clear enough for all to hear—the grim ancestors included. Possibly they trembled in their frames as they listened—those in the flesh around certainly felt a shiver of excitement as they caught the words:

"Of course I am a Rocca d'Oro, or half one, at least. By my father's side a Montalto. The Montaltos can trace back their ancestors to nearly fifty years beyond the della Roccas, and so——"

"Blasphemy—sheer blasphemy! what do you mean by it?" murmured the marchioness.

A groan from the bystanders.

"Oh, I thought you knew. I'm sorry. Please don't be vexed. It doesn't signify, you know. Ancestors are all very well in their way, but they don't count for much nowadays. The world is growing wiser."

"The world is going to destruction—that's what it is. I wish I were well out of it."

Something in the tone of the last words went straight to Anna's heart. With genuine feeling she knelt at her aunt's feet and, taking one of her withered but still beautiful hands in both her own, kissed it with real affection.

The Marchioness lay back in her chair with closed eyes. She made no attempt to withdraw her hand, only murmured: "She is a della Rocca, after all; but my heiress—no—no——"

Anna alone caught the words. They awakened a deep joy in her heart. A joy so great as to cause her to break out into a fit of hysterical weeping amid which, under her aunt's direction, she was led off to her rooms by Brigitta.

The little crowd opened obsequiously upon her passage. Anna had awakened a feeling of decided respect in all present. Perhaps not least of all in the Marchioness herself.

None but a genuine Rocca d'Oro could have ventured upon doing what Anna Montalto had just done. None witnessed the reaction.

IV.

Orsola della Rocca had begun to feel herself in a whirl of continual contradictions. Her niece's character and behaviour fairly bewildered her. The most audacious, and, to her, blasphemous,

outbreaks of ridicule at the expense of the defunct ancestors and the departed glory of their house alternated with the most affectionate and all-unused-to tenderness towards herself. It was something so new and unexpected that it puzzled, pained, and pleased the old lady in a most incomprehensible manner. She was not as yet aware of it, but the consciousness of not being so great and independent a personage as she had hitherto fancied herself had begun to dawn upon her. The icy crust that seclusion had built up around her heart was beginning, not to melt, but to crack; and through the crevices she caught glimpses of something better, higher and more worthy of living for, than worldly grandeur and earthly respect. Anna's sallies against all she had hitherto lived for, so to say, awakened a feeling of horror in the old lady's breast; but, at the same time, they also awakened no small amount of respect for the speaker. No living creature had ever dared speak in her presence in such a manner.

"It must all be the fault of her education," she would say; adding with a sigh: "What a pity! What a pity!"

For she never dreamed that these audacious sallies were prompted by cowardice—that Anna was like the soldier who threw himself into the breach because he saw no other way of escape.

And then, the Marchioness had, as many of us have, a fair share of the nettle in her. Touched with a shrinking hand, she stung; grasped with firmness, she remained harmless. Human nature cannot seclude itself from all save subordinate surroundings without paying the penalty of such an imprudence.

Anna instinctively felt that her aged relative needed affection; and, in consequence, her whole heart went out towards her. Anna was one of those who love all who stand in need of being loved. The whole castle took kindly to her—even the cats, who used to purr around her, their round heads rubbing against her dress, and their upright tails waving tremulously in the air. It was a trifle, but it wove a fresh link of the chain that was gradually binding aunt and niece to each other.

"I am sorry—very, very sorry!" the former would sigh. "She is kind and good, but, with her unhappy tendencies, she could never represent the family. I shall have to send for Cordelia. Ah, I am hardly tried! Not only a girl, but perhaps also a younger one. My poor nephew—if you had only lived!" It was terrible.

And then she felt her old arid heart daily thawing towards the girl with the sweet dark eyes and kindly smile. That was terrible, too, in its way. What was she to do? How would it all end? Meanwhile poor Anna was secretly pining amid all the solemn grandeur of her new life. She never complained, but she hated it, and her heart sickened when she thought of her dear ones in the old home by the open, sunlit sea. And she thought of them often enough!

The stately daily meals were a torment to her, with their endless dishes, their liveried servants, their choice wines, the enormous dining-

hall, and her aunt and herself, the chaplain and the secretary, seated at a table that would have accommodated a score, and left ample elbow-room into the bargain.

What a difference! And how many hundred times pleasanter were the homely meals of simple minestra, polenta, roasted larks redolent of rosemary, fish, salad, and so on, served on delft, and enjoyed with an appetite born of exercise and content! And the laughter and the chat, and Alberto, and old Erminia bustling from kitchen to dining-room, pressing everyone to eat, and joining in the conversation as if one of themselves, yet without losing one atom of respect or forgetting her place for a moment.

Dear old Erminia! What a distance from her withered, smiling face to the marble features of the footmen who watched every morsel she put into her mouth, and who seemed always to be lying in wait to pounce upon the plate before her! Her aunt was, after her fashion, very kind to her, and Anna's loving heart was filled with gratitude in consequence.

When she did break out in some sally or another against blue blood in general, and the ancestors in particular, it grieved her quite as much as it did the old lady; but to do so was her only bulwark against adoption, and every day that passed convinced her more and more of her unfitness for playing the great lady, and confirmed her dislike to doing so.

Wonderful to relate, there were no ghosts at Rocca d'Oro, in spite of ancestors of every moral hue, and a mass of masonry in which any number of the same might have lurked.

Not a belted knight paced the long echoing galleries—not a veiled lady glided down the wide staircases. No millionaire's modern mansion could have been freer from phantoms than was the castle.

But, to make up for this defect, there was a haunted ruin within a stone's throw—a high tower crowning a rocky crest, surrounded by a belt of bushes and straggling oaks.

V.

It was a rainy, wretched day. Woods and rocks glistened and streamed, and the sky was of a uniform leaden hue. Anna was sitting at one of the wide windows of her room. Sofia, the maid assigned to her exclusive service, was working at a table near. Without, nothing was heard but the pitiless pattering of the rain upon the boughs, and the awakening voice of the little stream yonsides the ridge upon which the tower rose. Within the castle itself absolute silence reigned.

"Why is that old ruin yonder called the 'Bella Alda's Tower,' Sofia?"

"Signorina, do you not know? I thought everybody——"

"No one ever told me, so how could I know? There—leave that skirt and come and sit by me in the window here."

Nothing loth, the girl obeyed. She had, like all the household, learned to love the simple, kindly-mannered young lady who had a gentle smile and a cordial word for all who approached her. They could scarcely credit her being a Rocca d'Oro, so different was her character from that which had become legendary in the country round.

"Well, you must know," began Sofia, "that hundreds of years ago —I forget how many—a certain Marchese Corrado was master here. And he was a demon, signorina—a very demon, and the terror of all he came across. For he spared neither high nor low, rich nor poor, and woe to any one who ventured to come between him and his desires."

"I understand. Go on."

"Down there, on the other side of the ridge, there lived in those days a forester and his family—I don't know his name, but it doesn't matter—good, honest people, and well-to-do also, for their daughter was brought up almost like a lady, and used to pass much of her time here at the castle together with the young ladies. Do I explain myself?"

"Yes—perfectly. And so——"

"So she grew up, and was known for many miles round as the most beautiful maiden in all the land. Even now they speak of her big blue eyes and wonderful golden hair."

"And, of course, the Marquis Corrado, the demon, fell in love with her?"

"Just so: the Marquis fell in love with her, and it was very wrong of him; for he couldn't marry her, you know—she was only a forester's daughter, and, besides that, he had a wife already."

"That was a difficulty, certainly."

"La Bella Alda"—for so everybody called her—was a good, honest girl, and would never listen to any of his declarations. She avoided him whenever she could. But the Marquis at last got furious, and one unlucky day he met the Bella Alda close to the foot of the tower yonder, and tried to seize her. There was no way of escape, so, in her terror, she flew up the steps of the tower—they must have been whole then, not like now, though one can still manage to scramble up to the platform at the top. Michele told me it was hard work for him, and he's a man. He went up to get me a pigeon's-nest."

"Who is Michele?"

Sofia blushed, looked down for a second, and then replied: "The sub-intendent's son and my future husband. As brave and fine a young man as ever walked!"

"My best wishes to you both! And La Bella Alda?"

"Yes. She reached the platform safe enough, but with the Marquis close behind her. He stretched out his hands to lay hold of her. 'If you touch me, I spring over,' she cried. But he only laughed. Then, with a 'Holy Virgin protect me!' over she sprang!"

"How dreadful!"

"Dreadful indeed! That is, it might have been dreadful. It was wonderful instead. For the Holy Virgin heard her prayer and bore her up, so that she reached the ground as safe and sound as you or I."

"And the Marquis?"

"The Marquis? He had gone up with hair as black as a crow, when he came down it was white as my lady's. Soon after, his wife died—of a broken heart it was said. Then he entered a monastery."

"And La Bella Alda?"

"She lived on for years. But she grew proud and pretentious: all Satan's doing, Father Ambrose says; he was determined to have her soul one way or another: and went telling everybody that she was under the Blessed Virgin's especial protection, and people used sometimes to laugh at her. And one day, when she had been boasting as usual, they dared her to take the leap again. And she did it, and was taken up dead."

"Horrible!" cried Anna, with a shudder.

"Horrible, indeed! but it was her just punishment, Father Ambrose says, for self-righteousness. Ever since then, La Bella Alda haunts the tower."

"Have you ever seen her?" asked Anna. "I should like to do so."

"Ah, Signorina, God grant you never may, for she only appears to give warning of the death of a della Rocca!"

There was a knock at the door. Sofia went to see who it was, and returned with a letter which she handed to her young mistress.

"From Cordelia!" cried she; then she opened it with eager, trembling fingers. Sofia returned to her sewing, while Anna remained at the window and read.

"My darling Sister,—

"How I wish I could curl myself up in an envelope like a caterpillar in a leaf, make Tista carry me to the post, and wake up with you at Rocca d'Oro! How astounded our grand-aunt would be, and what a lecture upon family dignity I should receive! But no, that would never do, and you shall see that my entry into what you call the old den, shall be of quite a different kind. For my entry there is decided upon. Her Ladyship has written to mamma about it. She likes you well enough, but says she could never entrust the family honours to one so incapable of appreciating them! The words are hers. I am sure from your letters that she must be very much nicer than any of the pictures we used to draw of her. I feel remorseful at times. I shall enter Rocca d'Oro fully prepared to please her in all I can, and also to love her, if possible. But only in case you, dearest, continue to refuse the inheritance. If you try, you can surely undo the past, and then, I am sure, aunt will adopt you at once. I know I shall make a much better châtelaine than you, but I will never stand

in your way unless you insist upon it. Do as you please, Whatever may be mine later shall also be yours and dear mamma's. You both know that.

"When you come back, and you are to come back before I leave for Ivrea, you will find the dear old place rather shabby. The vines are in a terrible state, and we shall hardly get a barrel of wine out of the whole. The disease has never been so bad. Even Alberto's vines have suffered, in spite of all his care. He has been away for the last four days, at Genoa, on business I believe. He is pining terribly after you, darling, comes down after every post to hear if you have written—wanders about for hours, and seems quite lost. I wish you could have corresponded, but I suppose mamma was right in forbidding it. He knows nothing about your coming back.

"Tista is well, so is Erminia, but she is getting very deaf. I wish you could have seen their faces when they were told of your return! They love you much more than they do me, everybody, mamma also does that though. I neither wonder at it, nor am I jealous. I have sighed all my life to enter the great world. I am a better della Rocca than you, dear. Mamma is writing to the Signora Marchesa. What an odd world this is! Nobody seems ever to get what he wants! You almost lament over the number of dresses and things aunt has given you; most other girls, I among the number, would go wild with delight over them. Well, console yourself with the thought that they will come in nicely for the Signora Alberto.

"There, mamma has finished writing, and Tista is waiting to be off. So good-bye, and a thousand kisses from your loving sister,

"CORDELIA."

On going to her room that evening, Anna read her letter once more through. They kept early hours at the castle, and not feeling sleepy, she took her favourite seat at the open window. Heavy clouds were billowing up from the horizon and betokened a coming storm. The rain had ceased, the heat was oppressive. From time to time the moon shone forth and flung sheets of silvery radiance upon the dripping woods, now lighting up the tall tower with ghostly gleam, now hiding as suddenly behind a mass of dark drifting vapour.

Anna gazed across at the ruin with newly awakened interest. Sofia's legend had taken her fancy. The rush of the stream, now swollen to a torrent, broke hoarsely upon the otherwise silent night.

Anna gazed forth and shuddered; she could not have told why, and had to cast a look round at her well-lit room and its comforts to reassure herself. The darkness was rapidly thickening without. It seemed to her as if a pall had been lowered upon the earth. Then came the growl of distant thunder. On it rolled, nearer and nearer, deeper and deeper, till once more it died away among the hills.

A sudden rift in the gloom overhead, and, for a second, the white light fell full upon the tower. Was she dreaming? There, upon its

summit stood a form with outstretched arms! She sprang to her feet and gazed out with straining eyes. But impenetrable gloom had once more wrapped its veil round all.

There she stood, watching with dilated eyes and beating heart. A blue flash, followed by a roar such as deafened all hearing, and, for a moment paralysed motion. Brief as was the glare however, it had revealed to Anna's eyes once more, a figure upon the summit of La Bella Alda's tower.

Covering her face with her hands, she sank back upon the chair.

At this moment the great bell at the castle gate rang forth in loud and clanging tones.

VI.

THAT same day a young man in a light linen travelling suit had left one of the chief hotels at Ivrea, and, after having carefully inquired his way, directed his steps towards the castle of Rocca d'Oro. He was not a Piedmontese, but a "Meridionale," as his accent at once discovered. But, though the Piedmontese are apt to be somewhat mistrustful of strangers from Southern Italy, the frank features and cheery smile of the one in question, impressed all favourably, and no one hesitated to give him the required directions.

The sky was of a dull grey and the rain was falling, but nothing seemed to deter the traveller, or make him hesitate in his purpose. There was a smile of happy expectation on his handsome face, and a throb of intense longing in his loyal heart.

"If I can only see her for a moment," he murmured to himself, "even from far, I shall return content. I *could* not hold out longer!"

Then on he strode with renewed energy. His light garments were quickly drenched, but love and hope carried him on, and in due time he reached the top of a ridge and saw the castle before him. The tower of La Bella Alda was but a few paces distant; he hied thither for shelter.

Niching himself under a broad, low arch, he began to review his position. He was forced to confess to himself that he had come upon something very like a wild goose chase. But no repentance mingled with the feeling. Of course, Anna could not come out in such weather. The rain had literally drowned all hope of that—but he might see her at some window—and, for a lover ardent as himself, that was already much.

So there he sat, gazing with longing, loving eyes at the grim pile before him that held all he most loved upon earth, and muttering fragmentary curses upon the pitiless Piedmontese sky overhead. Oh, for a little of the sunshine from his own sunny South!

He tried to light a cigar, but naturally failed. The matches were wet, and the next moment the box went flying into the elder-bush beside him.

The hours glided by. Slowly, perhaps, but not sadly. Alberto had, now and again, seen figures at one or another of the windows, but no glimpse of Anna had blessed his watchful eyes.

Drowsiness began to creep over him. He caught himself nodding; started, gazed more intently than before for a moment, then nodded again. The picture before him grew hazy and dim—a species of blurr; then vacancy. Another half start, his head sank forward, and he slept.

But strange, bewildering dreams surged up to rob him of rest—broken images in a never-ending maze. One in particular.

There, at the mouth of the arch, stood Anna, radiant with smiles, and holding out her hands towards him. He tried to grasp them—they eluded his touch. Once, twice, thrice; then at last, after a violent effort, he succeeded. But it was no longer Anna who stood before him. It was a maiden with sad blue eyes full of mystic meaning, and with an aureole of golden hair around her head. He let fall the hands he had seized, for they had suddenly grown chill as ice, and their cold pressure thrilled him to the core. She spoke—for he saw her lips move—but no words reached his ear, strain as he would. Then she glided from his side to the foot of the shattered stairs, and pointed upwards. She seemed to be relating something, but he could not catch her meaning. Her face took an expression of despair—she raised one hand as if to bid him listen, while, with the other, she pointed to the glen behind. A cry for help seemed to float up from the rocks and brushwood below. He turned, and, when he again sought the maiden's face, he saw her with swift and certain foot mounting the winding stairs, her golden hair and white robe gleaming with a light all their own. He was about to follow her when a second cry reached him.

He started violently, and awoke. So like reality had this last part of his vision been, that he caught himself listening for a repetition of the cry, and looking upwards to catch a glimpse of the golden-haired maiden. But neither repaid his trouble, and, with a little laugh at his own credulity, he sat down once more.

But his limbs were cramped, and he felt chilled. Want of food and wet were making themselves felt.

He thought that a little motion would do him good, and so began to climb the crazy old stairs. He reached the top with little difficulty and less danger. The lower steps were somewhat broken, but the higher he got, the better he found them.

Just below the platform was a sort of little chamber—dry and snug—a perfect palace compared with the niche below in which he had been cooped. And, best of all, a narrow window gave him a full view of the castle opposite.

He mounted to the platform to take a survey, keeping carefully behind the battlements. Then he went back to the chamber below to resume his watch. Prudence whispered him to return there and

then to Ivrea, rest, and a hot meal—love urged him to remain where he was, and shiver. And love conquered.

Perseverance at last had its reward. Darkness had fallen, and, at one of the illuminated windows, he recognized Anna.

He sprang upon the platform, and eagerly waved his arms towards her.

Then the storm broke. And yet, all unheeding, Alberto kept to his post. Cold, hunger, fatigue, all were forgotten in his exultation as he stood and gazed.

A momentary lull in the tempest, and, during the brief pause, the cry that Alberto had heard in his dreams floated up once more. No fancy this time, however, but the wail of one in agony and peril.

For a moment Alberto listened and hesitated, then, with a final wave to his beloved, he commenced a descent. Now blinded by the lightning, now aided by its glare, he made his way down; clinging here, groping there, till at last he reached the ground in safety.

As he stepped into the gloom the cry was repeated. Rapidly as he was able he scrambled down the slope. Wet bows flapped in his face, clothes and hands were torn and scratched. Yet on he went, till, thanks to energy, and aided by a gleam or two of faint moonlight, he reached the spot whence the cry had come. A man lay upon the ground. Alberto knelt beside him.

"At last, thank God!"

"Where are you hurt?"

"My leg, it is broken."

"Have you been here long?"

"Hours."

"Do you think you can manage to rise?"

No reply; the injured man had fainted. For a moment Alberto hesitated, but for a moment only. With one more look at the prostrate man, he turned and bounded up the slope. The moon had burst forth white and clear, and he could make his way without difficulty. From the summit he saw the castle rising grim and grey before him, and with fleet foot he crossed the narrow valley and made for the front entrance. There he rang such a peal at the great gate as flung the inhabitants into no slight commotion.

VII.

Who could ring like that, and at such an hour, in so authoritative a manner?

"It must be a Royal messenger," said the Marchioness to Brigitta, who was aiding her mistress to make a hasty toilette. "His Majesty is at Turin. No, not that shawl, the other. Or a despatch from the Ministry concerning my poor murdered nephew. There, let us go now."

The whole household almost had assembled in the great hall, and varied was the exhibition of toilettes in every stage of progression. On the Marchioness's entrance one and all drew aside, so that she found herself in an open space and face to face with a young man whose eyes were flashing with excitement, and whose dress was in the most deplorable disorder. Mud-stained, moss-marked, torn in places and bedraggled in a manner impossible to describe. A more perfect contrast to a self-sufficient Royal messenger or ministerial emissary could scarcely be conceived.

The old lady almost started, while a frown gathered above her dark bright eyes. Alberto's face bore no trace of suffering, had it done so, the frown would not have appeared; she saw nothing but a stalwart and apparently healthy young man, who had invaded her home in disreputable garments, and at a most impertinent hour. That was quite enough. But more was to come, and that, too, before any word of explanation could be either asked or given.

A faint cry broke from the group near the foot of the staircase, and then Anna rushed forwards, seizing the intruder by the arm and, in a tone that touched all present, cried, "Mamma—Cordelia, are they——"

"As well as possible," Alberto hastened to say. "It was nothing about them that brought me here."

"Thank God!" ejaculated Anna.

"And may I ask what *did* bring you here, sir, and who you are?" demanded the Marchioness, with an ominous ring in her voice and a yet more expressive drawing up of her slight figure.

In a few hurried but sufficiently clear words, Alberto explained the situation. Fortunately for him, the old lady never remembered to ask what had brought him lurking about her residence at such an undue hour; had she done so, poor Alberto would have been terribly put to for a reply. Her frown relaxed at once, and, almost before Alberto's last word was uttered, she was giving orders with a promptitude and forethought that spoke well for head and heart.

Like many others in this misty world of ours, Orsola della Rocca was much more sinned against than sinning. She had obstinately persisted in donning a mantle pieced together with the armorial rags and remnants of her ancestors and the past, and the world had neither time nor inclination to lift the folds and discover the good that lay hidden beneath.

It was nearly an hour before the men, who had at once been despatched with a stretcher from the castle, returned and deposited the injured man upon the bed prepared for him. After careful examination, the doctor declared there to be no immediate danger, though the fracture of the ankle was serious, and the patient in a very weak state. He had plainly undergone recent and severe hardship, for he was terribly emaciated, and pale in spite of sunburn. Everything was done for his relief and comfort, and the doctor and one

of the head servants were to pass the night at his bedside. Bidding the former send her a report early next morning, the Marchioness carried Anna off to her own apartments.

The latter passed an uncomfortable quarter of an hour there, poor girl, for her aunt questioned her closely, with her bright old eyes relentlessly fixed upon her face, and had no great difficulty in obtaining a tolerably clear insight into the true state of affairs. She made no remark, however. Only when Anna, upon her dismissal, made a movement to kiss her grand-aunt's hand as usual, the hand was quietly, but decidedly, withdrawn, and the customary "*Dormez bien, petite,*" surrogated by an icy "*Bonne nuit, Mademoiselle.*" Nor could appealing eyes obtain anything more.

VIII.

None could guess what the morrow was about to bring forth.

The sun rose in cloudless glory, the rain-drops glittered like diamonds on blade and bow, the bees hummed amidst the flowers, the birds sang from the thickets, the hoarse roar of the rivulet had once more sunk to a tuneful tinkle. Without the castle all was peace and repose, within it all was conjecture and excitement.

The adventure of the past night was an event in the lives of the dwellers therein. To one or two it was about to prove of life importance.

The patient lay upon his bed. He was better—infinitely better—for after the skilful setting his leg had become far less painful, Alberto sat at his side, for he insisted upon having him there. Rightly enough he regarded Alberto as the saviour of his life. Had he not found and rescued him, he must certainly have died of exhaustion and exposure. He felt grateful in consequence.

There was a knock at the door. The doctor went to see who it was.

"Please, sir, her Ladyship has sent to ask if she can pay a visit to her sick guest, and at what o'clock."

"Whenever her Ladyship pleases. There is no danger, but I will ask the patient himself."

He did so, and, while willingly assenting, a strange smile wandered over his drawn features. He complained of the light hurting his eyes, and begged them to draw the curtains partially. His desire was at once complied with, and the large lofty room was wrapped in a semi-gloom that contrasted strongly with the golden sunshine without.

Alberto rose to go.

"No, no, don't stir. Please remain just where you are."

"But the Marchioness——"

"Never mind the Marchioness. She will be quite content to have you there. I give you my word for it."

Alberto looked wonderingly at the patient; then resumed his seat.

Not over willingly, it must be confessed. He had a wholesome dread of Orsola della Rocca, and, perhaps, not wholly without cause.

A few minutes later the door was opened to its widest width, and the old lady entered. The patient drew the sheet quite up to his chin.

With slow, stately, but noiseless step she approached the bed; stopped within a yard or so, and then, with a stately bend of the head but also with a courteous smile said:

"You are welcome to my house, sir. I only regret that an unhappy accident was the cause that brought you here."

The stranger thanked her. But, in a voice that had suddenly grown husky.

While he was doing so, his hostess settled herself in the armchair that Brigitta had wheeled near the bed. Alberto, who had risen and who was standing there somewhat sheepishly, was struck at seeing something very like a tear gather in the patient's eyes. "Poor fellow," he thought, "he must be weak as a girl. But then it was a deuce of an accident to be sure."

There was a momentary silence. The heavy curtains waved softly to and fro in the warm summer air, causing uncertain lights and shadows to play upon all within.

I am happy to learn from the doctor that you are doing well. My house and all it contains are at your disposal. It was a fortunate thing that they found you!"

"Yes, indeed. Had it not been for this fine fellow here," with a motion of his head towards Alberto, who blushed like a girl, "I should now be——"

"Don't think of it," interrupted the old lady; "think, rather, of getting strong once more. It was a bad fracture, the doctor says."

"Yes. I stumbled into a hole covered with moss. I had taken the short cut across from the town, and——"

He stopped. The Marchioness looked at him curiously. She was too high-bred to ask what had induced him to take a short cut that led nowhere but to her house. Yet she would very much have liked to know.

"I was on my way to friends," he added.

"Ah, you have friends in the neighbourhood?"

"Yes, madam. One, at least. One whom I have not seen for long, long years. Almost the only relation I have in the world."

The Marchioness continued to gaze at him. Something in his tone seemed to strike her. There were tears in it, as the French say.

"Would you like your relative to be informed? To be sent for?"

"There is no need, thank you. She will know all in good time."

"She? Your mother, perhaps?"

"No, Signora, my aunt."

Rapidly the old lady passed in mental review all the families around. None suited the circumstances. Yet her unknown guest

was evidently a gentleman. Language and voice showed the highest breeding; ears and hands the bluest blood.

She was unpleasantly puzzled. "He must have some reason for not giving his name. Well, the incognito shall be respected," thought the old lady.

"How glad your aunt will be when she hears of your escape!"

"And how grateful to my preserver here." He took Alberto's hand as he spoke.

"Of course. Yes; she ought to be grateful indeed!"

She sighed; for the thought of how boundlessly grateful she would have shown herself to anyone that could have saved her poor nephew from his cruel death. She had scarcely ever seen him since his boyhood, his mania for travelling and exploration having occupied his whole life. But his loss had, nevertheless, been a sad trial to her.

"Yes, indeed; she ought to be grateful," he repeated. "Not exactly on my own personal account," he laughed, "for I have been a careless, undutiful dog of a nephew, but because I am the last of my race, and——"

A sudden trembling seized upon the old lady. She looked piteously into the stranger's face.

"The last of your race, Signore? The last of your race? Oh, then, I—all of us—must be doubly careful of you, for your own sake—for you aunt's—for the name you bear——"

She paused. Then continued in a lower tone, as if to herself, but with an accent that went straight to the hearts of her hearers—

"Ah, I, too, had a nephew—the last of my race and name; he was hardly ever out of my thoughts, for in him were centred all my hopes. Lands, honours, all were to have been his; and I was ever picturing to myself this old place gladdened by the prattle of his children, who would carry on the unbroken line of our ancestors. But it was not to be—it was not to be; and now——"

Her voice failed her.

"And now?" repeated the stranger, in a low, husky tone, taking the old lady's passive hand in both his own: "and now?"

A shriek from old Brigitta made everyone start. There she stood, clinging convulsively to the back of her mistress's chair, and staring wildly at the stranger.

A stronger breath of the summer breeze had swelled the swaying curtains wider apart, and caused the mellow, golden sunshine to flood the hitherto darkened room.

"It is—it is—oh, my mistress, my darling mistress—it is your nephew himself—your nephew himself!"

Orsola della Rocca sprang to her feet, pale as a sheet and with hands clasped in an agony of doubt and supplication.

"Speak—for mercy's sake, speak! Who are you?"

"Aunt—my poor dear aunt, I am your truant nephew, Guido della Rocca."

She fell on her knees beside the bed. "God be praised—oh, God be praised!" she cried. Her head sank upon her nephew's arm, and her whole frame was shaken by convulsive sobs.

"Aunt, my dear aunt!"

There was not a dry eye in the room. Alberto fairly wept. He was learning at his own expense that one does not always need a "deuce of an accident" to make one "weak as a girl."

Comparative composure being restored, all was simply and briefly cleared up. After undergoing a long and terrible captivity to one of the hostile tribes in Central Africa, Guido della Rocca had at last found means of escape, but only long after a false report of his massacre had been spread. After incredible hardship he had reached the coast and procured a passage for Genoa. He had come on thence without delay; had got out at a small station, intending to take a short cut to the castle; had fallen, and been found by Alberto—all as simple as extraordinary things generally turn out in the end. Brigitta had recognised him from having seen him once or twice at his mother's house during her last long illness and whither she had been sent by the Marchioness. A romance woven of the most commonplace, everyday facts. Orsola della Rocca sat holding one of her nephew's hands in hers, almost as if she feared she might lose him once more.

A sudden remembrance strikes her. She rises, makes the tour of the huge bed to where Alberto is standing, takes his strong, brown hands in her slim, delicate ones, and says: "It is thanks to you, under God's will, that I am to-day the happiest woman in all Italy. Ask what you will in return—ask without fear—it shall not be refused you."

To this day Alberto Feliciani cannot tell how he ever managed to do and say it. He declares that the words passed his lips without any effort of his own. It is easy to guess what he *did* ask, but impossible to describe the tone in which his "Grant me the hand of your grand-niece, O gracious lady!" was uttered, or picture the surprise of all present on seeing the handsome young giant kneeling at the feet of the frail, high-born old Marchioness.

She grew deadly pale, then flushed crimson. The struggle was violent but short.

"Marchese Guido della Rocca"—turning to her nephew—"from the moment you entered this house you became the head of the family. It is for you to decide."

"You gave your word, aunt, and a della Rocca cannot retract. But, all things considered, I think it is best to let Anna herself decide."

With a cry of joy Alberto sprang to his feet. He knew that at last the victory was his.

IX.

A LOVELY September night; the full moon smiling softly down upon shimmering sea and olive-clad height; the air full of balmy odour; flowers sleeping with gently drooping heads; leaves folded in slumber like hands in prayer; the idle swish of waters upon the beach; the occasional flutter of a bird among the ilex and magnolia. Such the scene as they all sat there upon the terrace in front of Countess Altamonte's modest home.

Orsola della Rocca lying back in a low garden-chair; Brigitta on a stool at her feet; the Countess at her aunt's side; Anna and Cordelia, Alberto and Guido, grouped a few paces off; Battista and Erminia in the background, seated upon the doorstep of the dwelling.

"And you really think your stay here has done you good, dear aunt?"

"It has indeed. And I feel so happy, too! I cannot tell you how happy! This last event has crowned all my wishes."

She looked over towards her nephew and Cordelia, who had wandered on as far as the balustrade, and were standing there, close together, apparently gazing down at the sea.

"I should like them to marry as soon as possible. Could not both our dear girls be married on the same day?"

"Of course they can, aunt, if you wish it, and if——"

"I *do* wish it with all my heart. I have got all business matters done, so that there is no hindrance."

"Dear aunt, I don't know how to thank you for your liberality to my daughters and myself. Thanks to you, we——"

"Thank me then by never speaking about it. I don't know how I could have been so unmindful of you all these long years. Worse than unmindful—it was cruel; cruel in the extreme."

"My dear aunt, don't distress yourself——"

"Can you forgive me?"

Countess Altamonte took her aunt's hand in hers, and pressed it tenderly in reply.

The Marchioness lay back with closed eyes, murmuring softly to herself, "Cruel—cruel, indeed!"

The white moonlight fell full upon her, softly illuminating her calm well-cut features, and her frail, clasped fingers with their glittering rings.

"Yes, dear," she continued after a pause, "my whole life has been a foolish mistake—I see it all now. But, God be thanked, the awakening has come. Late, very late, but still it has come. I have never known until now what real happiness meant. Pray God to prolong my days, that I may yet further atone for the past."

A prayer that seems as if it would be granted; for Aunt Orsola grows younger every day; and whenever they all meet, which is often, a happier gathering does not exist in the whole of sunny Italy.

A. BERESFORD.

BY CHANCE.

THE day was fast declining, and a cool breeze from the hills was sweeping over the drowsy little Devonshire village, as the two equestrians, who were filling up an idle summer in scouring the wildest and most romantic parts of the West Country, slackened rein, and looked about for a possible night's lodging. They were men of some thirty years or so, with all the world-worn marks that show themselves, or are assumed, so conspicuously at that age.

Graduated together at Balliol, Oxford, they had both dropped into easy fortunes, and settled in the same chambers in London to run their luck in the literary world.

Society had been electrified from time to time by daring articles in the periodicals of unconventional odour, and brilliant spirited witticisms; whilst the philosophic world had welcomed the subtle reasoning and amazing power of language that fell from another unknown pen. And the two men were as unlike in character and physique as they were in mind and taste. Jack Derwent was strongly and gracefully built, and endowed with all the fascinations of the correctly handsome face.

But Jack knew, with all his sparkling *bonhomie* and good looks, he had never learnt the secret magnetism that drew the women of deeper soul to prefer the society and eccentric visage of his friend. Cope's face denoted all the mental strength and force of the man; by far too expressive, too shadowed and lined with thought, to give one any distinct idea of what the mere features were, but a face unmistakably indicative of keen intellectual power and great-hearted sympathies. A face that one trusted instinctively or shrank from in nervous fascination. What his personal magnetism was, no one had ever defined, but all recognised its living influence. In every circle of society he was always the central attraction, and yet his almost aggravating modesty and lack of self-esteem had thwarted, and were likely to thwart, all his friend's ambitious ideas for him.

In spite of a delicate constitution, he could rise to all his companion's enjoyment of life, and had expressed his delight in the rich beauty of the country through which they were riding by many a poetic outburst, which the effete Jack had attempted to crush.

"Don't you think," cried the latter, "that looks a possible place?" pointing to a farm at the end of the deep, red lane.

"Yes," Earle replied; "I already embrace the cider."

"And the pretty farmer's daughter!" and Jack pointed with his whip through the trees to their right, to a small figure dressed in rough serge and a coloured kerchief, driving home the cattle.

"No, I am weary of women, and agree with the sage old Father of

the church, who denounced them as, 'a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a deadly fascination, and a painted ill.'"

Jack laughed. "Not much paint about a farmer's daughter. Hallo! my lass, can you tell us if we can get a night's lodging anywhere about here?"

They had overtaken the girl and the cattle, but Jack's familiarity met with no response; she walked slowly on without apparently the least idea she had been addressed, and there was something strangely dignified in the girl's walk, and the imperious pose of her head beneath the kerchief. The men glanced at each other, and Earle sprang to the ground and reached her side.

"Would you oblige us"—he began, and she turned and faced him. For a moment he was taken aback by the beauty of the woman, and the innate refinement of her whole mien.

"Yes?" she asked, scanning his face with a fearless smile. "What is it you want?"

"A night's lodging," he answered. "Perhaps you would kindly direct us."

"We can take you in at the farm if you will ride on. That is the entrance."

She returned his bow with proud indifference and fell back.

"By Jove!" Jack exclaimed. "What magnificent eyes! and what a voice!"

"Yes," said Earle; "I have forgotten my thirst."

They found a ready accommodation, and the hearty farmer delighted to welcome them.

"I'm glad for my daughter," he said, rubbing his hands and eyeing the horses as a lad unstrapped the knapsacks from the saddles and led them away. "I'm always glad for my daughter when a scholar turns up. She's like her mother, and the old lady before her, fond of a bit of learning. Where will ye like to sup? It's cool in the porch here."

Later on he came and suggested a walk round the place before it was too dark, for there were various points of traditional interest connected with it. Jack readily accepted, but Earle pleaded fatigue, and preferred to smoke in the porch.

"Bertha," the farmer called to his daughter, "bring the gentleman that paper Squire Godwin left last week."

"My father has no idea news a week old is slightly uninteresting," she said, as she brought it with a smile. "This is the *Saturday Review*, and a very poor number."

"You are a reader yourself?" Earle could not resist asking.

"I read everything that comes in my way," she answered. "But I am interrupting your smoke."

She passed down the path, and he quickly followed and opened the gate. A red glow of sunlight flashed upon her as she smiled

to thank him, and he wondered if he had ever seen so beautiful a woman.

Jack came back limping, supporting himself on the farmer's arm.

"Sprained my ankle, confound it!" he explained, and the farmer entered on a long tirade against the learning that took away all a man's common-sense; and Earle never quite grasped how it had happened. Bertha came quickly to the fore, and showed a remarkable skill in binding.

"It is not very severe," she said; "but you will have to keep your foot up, and must prolong your stay for a few days, which I hope will not be a great inconvenience to you?"

"It is a happy necessity," he answered quickly.

"The couch in my sitting-room is the most comfortable, father," she said, "and these gentlemen shall with pleasure occupy the room."

They both protested, and only gave in when she promised that it should not banish her or her father. Earle approached it with curiosity. There is always so much that is characteristic in the arrangement of a room, and how would this woman with her stately mien and white hands have described her tastes? He certainly did not expect quite the charm of the artistic touches he found. It was all so simple, but so perfect in harmony of colouring, so graceful in its poverty. The little oak bookcase held her few treasures; the walls were bare except for one or two water-colour sketches and a portrait in oils. Of herself?

Jack's eyes asked the question as he glanced from it to her own face, and saw the strong likeness.

"No," she smiled, "every one makes that mistake. It was an ancestor of mine on my mother's side, who died very tragically—curiously enough in this very house."

"May we know the tragedy?"

Jack sank back on the couch and she raised the pillows for him.

"Oh, it is very little I can tell you; you shall see the room before you go, if you like," she said dropping her voice. "My father cannot bear the subject mentioned, and has fallen into the old superstition of allowing nothing to be touched."

"Is it the room above that queer wooden staircase at the north end?" Jack asked.

"Yes; you noticed it? The farm in those days was the old Manor House, and this girl, the daughter of the house, had the misfortune to be beautiful without realising the misfortune. One Christmas Eve a ball was given in the neighbourhood, and there she met her fate. It is supposed her lover, mad with love and jealousy, followed her home and surprised her in her room as she was undressing. She was found in the morning stabbed, her ball-dress flung on the bed, and the man's sword lying on the floor in a pool of blood. The dress and sword have never been removed, they are lying there still."

"But the man?"

"No one ever traced him, or, as far as I can make out, attempted to do so!"

"It would have been easy enough," Jack cried excitedly; "the man's sword would most likely have betrayed him—it probably bears his crest."

"Which rust has slightly obliterated. But you shall see it."

It was a promise he was eager should be fulfilled, but the opportunity was slow in coming, as it was necessary the farmer should be out of the way. But the time passed pleasantly enough for the two men, who delighted in the companionship of this intellectual, self-cultured woman.

"I wonder," Jack said once, when he had watched her pass the window in her dark green habit—"I wonder if she would be as beautiful under other circumstances?"

Earle looked up from his book with a quick, scrutinising glance.

"I doubt if she would be as happy."

"That is begging the question; but what do you mean?"

"Throw such a woman into a greater intensity of life, where all her powers would be called into play, and she would suffer acutely."

"But beautifully! One would be careful to surround her with all the refinements of beauty that would appeal to her sensibilities. Here her spirit must be for ever unsatisfied."

"I think not. Goethe says 'no circumstance is unpoetic to the poet,' and I think she fulfils that. But to go back to your first question. Such a woman must always be beautiful, anywhere, everywhere, and she must create beauty wherever she breathes."

"My dear fellow, your enthusiasm will be the ruin of you! And I am not sure you are right. She is the genius of this place, because all surrounding beauty falls short of her, and because she strikes the one harmonic note. But picture her in a higher idealic atmosphere, take her from her isolation——"

"You can't! She must for ever be isolated—the one distinctive, not harmonic, note—the one ideal that has fulfilled itself."

He walked to the window, and pushed aside the curtain to gain a wider view. "This place is a dream of beauty. But why should we stay any longer? Your foot's all right."

"What a restive animal man is! I don't intend to go till I have seen the mystic chamber."

"My dear boy! A few rags and cobwebs. Besides, Miss Lane told me this morning there would be a brilliant opportunity whilst her father was at market this evening."

They made the investigation, and Jack was intrusted with the sword to make any discoveries he could. He took it to his own room, and Earle followed his hostess back to the house. But both paused in the porch, and turned to watch the late sun reddening the deep-shadowed lane at their feet.

"Mr. Derwent declares sunsets are out of date—vulgarised! How

amusing he is with his effete indifference!" she said, glancing with her beautiful smile into Earle's face.

"It is a borrowed cynicism that he certainly amusingly assumes," Earle laughed. "But London is sated with these ideas; and all life becomes shallow and unreal when they are indulged."

"Are you not a little cynical yourself?"

"What makes you say that?" he asked quickly.

"I am never altogether sure whether you are laughing at me or not," she said, a little nervously.

"Laughing at *you!* I should be denying the grandest hope of my life."

"What have I to do with that?" The smile of an undefined surprise parted her lips, and her eyes darkened.

Earle caught her hands, and held them fiercely in his own.

"I mean you have taught me—you are teaching me—that there is an immeasurable, inexhaustible attainment, beyond the buried facts of life; or else one's soul has been awaked in vain, and the glimpse of heaven the cruellest of all illusions."

She took her hands gently away, and turned from him.

"You are in a strange, impressionable mood. I don't quite understand you. But it is only a passing emotion, and when you have returned to your own surroundings, you will forget this moment."

"Bertha!"

"Hush!—not you—not you!" and she covered her face with her hands. Then with an effort, she came close to him, and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"You have stayed too long—stayed until the great pulses of life are drugged with false illusions. Go back! Go back to reality, and leave the thought of me here. I—oh! I am no friend—no possible worth to such as you!"

Again he took possession of her hands, and his lips were very white.

"You have no trust in me? No—why should you? Men have told you—I know there was never a man who crossed your threshold but has told you—you are beautiful, and he loves you. I tell you neither; such expressions are commonplace, insulting. I only tell you, by some wonderful fatality, my soul has been drawn into touch with a greater soul; and the only response of my being lies in you. I only tell you the life of glory, for a few blissful weeks, has been revealed to me—revealed in your eyes, your smile—and when its memory dies, I shall be worse than dead."

He bent over her, his breath fanned her brow, and she heard the beating of his heart.

For one instant she trembled, and a great sob rose in her bosom; and then she said:

"No man has so honoured me. But I will not, I dare not listen to you. The world lies at your feet; you are born for greatness. And it shall not be lost, sacrificed for a passing fancy for a farmer's daughter!"

She bowed her proud, lovely head beneath his gaze, and walked past him into the house.

The sword was still undergoing its scouring and polishing when Earle came in an hour later, and Jack was far too eager to notice any change on his friend's face, but he was a little irritated with Earle's renewed persistence on leaving the following day.

"I was just making up my mind to stay here all the autumn," he said.

"What, and give up Switzerland and Lady Grace?"

Jack reddened. "Ah! there is beauty personified," he sighed; "or conventionalised?"

"You are a Philistine, Earle! there is not the smallest hope for you. Hallo! by George!"

"Eureka?"

"Yes, but look at that! *Aut vincere aut mori.*"

Earle stared and took the sword from Derwent's hand.

"It is what you supposed," he said after a careful examination. "It is my own crest, and I am the descendant of a murderer; a murderer of——" He stopped, and the sword dropped to the ground. Bertha was in the room.

"I have come for it," she cried; "it must be returned. I—I heard what you said—*your* crest!"

Earle picked it up and gave it to her, laughing bitterly.

"A beautiful inheritance to have dropped upon, is it not? A complete and irreversible answer to all my pleading," he added below his breath, and his eyes burnt her with their fierce light.

"I cannot see what you have proved," Jack cried; the whole truth of the scene flashing startlingly upon him.

"*Everything!* There are initials—my own, too, by another strange coincidence—E. C."

"But what has a jealous mania to do with you?"

"I bear the stain on my name. An hour ago, this lady did me the honour to listen to my addresses. I make her now the sincerest apology, and I will not intrude another night under her roof. May I order my horse, madam?"

The graceful courtesy of this man touched her deeply. She put the sword from her as if it had pierced her, and looked in his face with her eyes full of tears.

"If you put yourself to this inconvenience, you will pain me greatly. Please stay as long as you intended, and grant me a few words before you leave. I am a little overwrought, I will not see you again to-night."

She held out her hand to Jack, and he saw the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"Thank you," was all Earle said, and he did not see her face.

The dews were heavy on the green fields the next morning when he waited to bid her good-bye. Jack had agreed to follow him later in

the day. And he was standing now, one hand on his bridle, looking up the lane for the flutter of the white gown, and the breeze stirring the dark hair of the proud bare head that he should never see again.

She came at last, pale in her beauty and majestic in her pain.

"You were kind to grant me this," she said, and she took the red rose, all wet with dew, from her breast, and held it up to him.

"Wear it to-day," she said, "for my sake, and know that I shall ever think of you apart from all other men; that I cannot connect you with any incident of the past, and that if you would leave me without one bitter thought, you will wipe this story from your memory now and for ever."

"Bertha, you are noble and generous! I dare not accept your words, but one question I will, I must ask you. Has my coming here brought you any pain?"

"It is a pain that is beautiful," she answered, unconsciously rendering Jack Derwent's ideal for her. "No one could come into contact with you and feel quite the same again, and I—I——"

"What?" he whispered; but he had read the passion of love in her eyes, and he had folded her closely to his breast.

"Bertha, is it true? I would have waited for you for ever; but I will not go away to-day, my love; nor ever, without you."

LILIAN STREET.

DISILLUSION.

WIDE was the world in days gone by,
High towered its summits to the sky;
And far away went sea and shore
Winding and gleaming evermore:
Now rounded by a span might be
The low and little sphere I see.

Fair was the world in days of old,
Through silver mist and haze of gold
I saw the gloom, I saw the glow,
Which morn and only morn can show:
On flowerless field and leafless way,
Nor cloud nor colour steals to-day.

My feet went lightly to the strain
Of happy birds, whose glad refrain
Was: "Onward, onward, perfect bliss
Awaits to crown thee with her kiss."
Now softer fall their accents clear:
"She comes, she comes; but never here!"

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The Argosy

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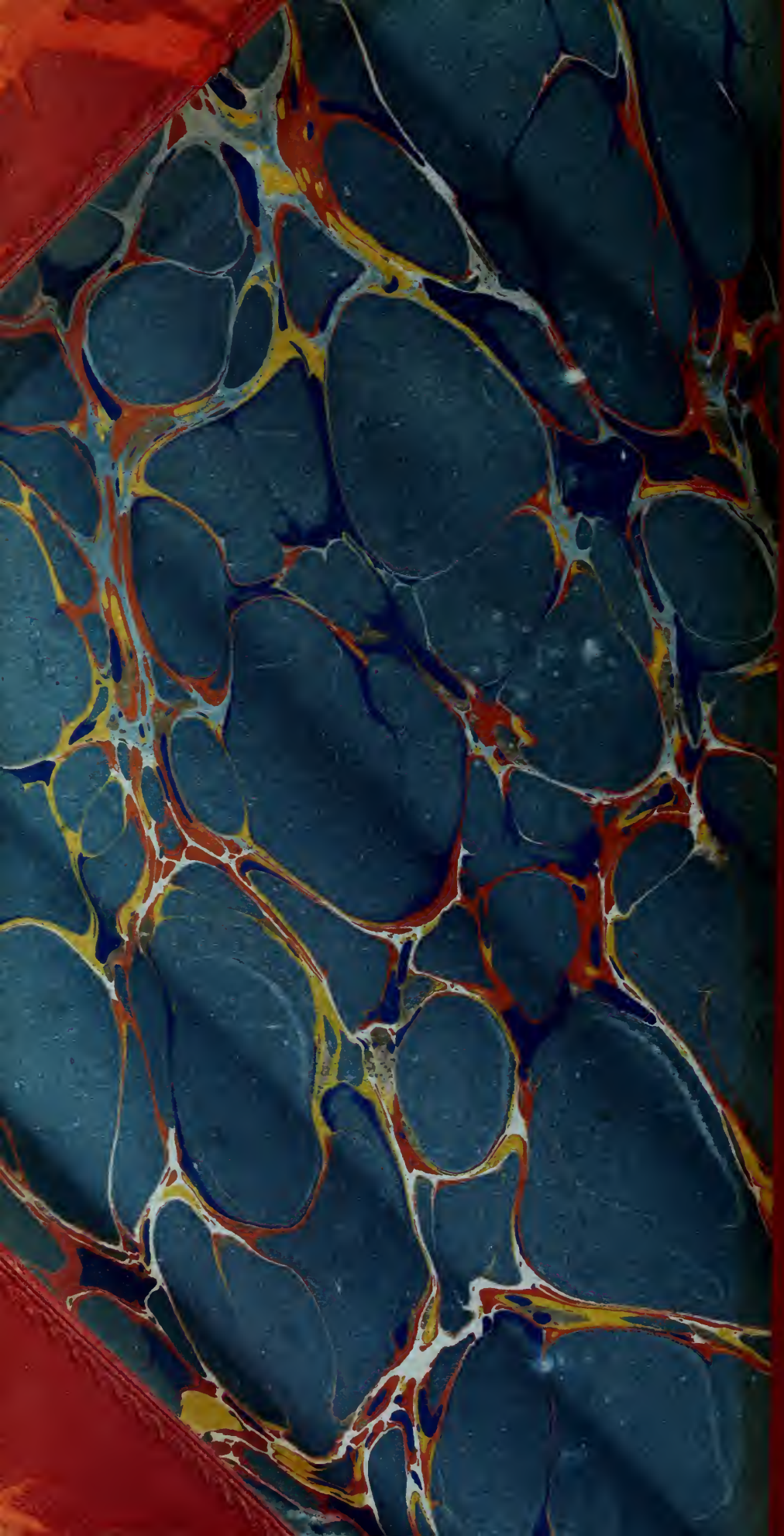
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